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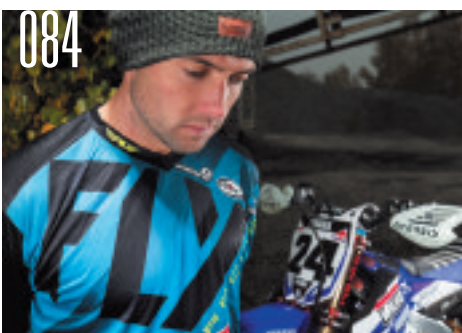
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© SIMON CUDDY

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DESCRIBE TOM PAGES' SKILLS ON A DIRT BIKE
© RED BULL CONTENT POOL

ED SPEAKS

During my fairly awesome Christmas break with my beautiful wife and family I stumbled across a thread on an internet forum showcasing photographs of old tracks that are now nothing more than overgrown shadows of their former selves. It was a stark reminder that nothing lasts forever and how the sport of motocross has lost some amazing – as well as some not so amazing – venues over the years.

It's worrying that I can easily list off a bunch of killer tracks that I wish were still around for us all to enjoy even though I'm totally aware that not all of them were nearly as killer as I remember them. Time has a habit of doing that though – it changes reality and alters our perception.

Without trying too hard I can list off ones that I really enjoyed riding like Trentham Gardens, Crick, Launde Abbey, Belleair Farm, Cuerdon Park, Wrangway, Rushton Spencer, Byley, Warsop Sand Bowl, Hatherton Hall, Cheddleton, Matchams Park, Appley Bridge and Brownhills as well as ones I wasn't lucky enough to – such as Gore Basin on the Isle of Wight. I can also recollect some absolute terrors that are no longer with us, thank god, like Eldon Hill and Scammonden.

Being the sad old buffoon I am, I actually like nothing more than trying to track down these old venues on the satellite view of Google Maps to see what scars remain so I can ride them with my cursor. Yep, I know I need to get out and get a life but it is the off-season after all...

More worrying than my off-season habits is the fact that riding the remnants of disused tracks on Google Maps might be all any of us are doing in

just a few years time if the EU push through the Vnuk ruling and the UK insurance industry stuck to their guns and say that motorsport is totally uninsurable. If that were to happen then we'd all be screwed and motocross, enduro and every other form of motorised sport would be pretty much outlawed overnight.

I don't actually believe we'll ever actually get to that point as pretty much everyone involved from grassroots racer right through to the bike importers, regulating bodies and random bigwigs including Boris Johnson are dead against it. The government is already discussing the derogation of certain vehicle groups and there's no way they'll want to miss out on all the taxable revenue the motorsports industry creates so I believe it's in this way that motorsport will be saved. Let's hope so anyway...

By the time you read this the 2017 race season will be well under way with Arenacross, AMA Supercross, SuperEnduro and the British Extreme Enduro Championship all springing into life on the weekend between us finishing DBR and it actually going on sale – I hate it when that happens! The Hawkstone International ain't that far off either and when that's passed then you know it's on like Donkey Kong and before you know it we'll be discussing the season that's just flown us right by!

Still, I wouldn't change it for anything. So until next month...



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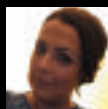
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ON THE
COVER...



AMA SUPERCROSS CHAMPION RYAN DUNGEY AT THE 2017 FACTORY KTM TEAM SHOOT



Due to the time it takes for DBR to get from the printer on to the shelves of shops we were unable to include any Anaheim 1 coverage even though it'll have already happened by the time you read this which is kinda confusing and annoying, huh? What we do have are these awesome shots of reigning SX champ Ryan Dungey taken by Simon Cudby at the Factory KTM Team Launch that were so damn hot we just had to stick one on the cover...



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ELECTRIC STORM!

ALTA MOTORS IS MAKING THE HEADLINES IN ALL THE RIGHT WAYS WITH THE WORLD'S FIRST COMPETITIVE ELECTRIC MOTOCROSS BIKE...

Words by Max Hind Photos by Max Hind and Jason Hansen

Silicon Valley is a hub of innovation, a centre of technological advancement, a place where the future is created. Many of the world's leading tech companies choose to call it home – Apple, Google, Netflix, Facebook, YouTube, eBay and Tesla are just some of the big players based in the San Francisco Bay area.

Silicon Valley companies have dramatically changed the way in which we live our lives and will continue to shape and influence our future and maybe – just maybe – one of them will have a part to play in the future of the motocross world...

The Alta Motors HQ is actually located just a little north of the technological hub and just a tad south of San Francisco itself in an ideal spot for this seriously cool young company.

"We have people here from Tesla and from Toyota," says Jon Bekefy, Alta's Director of Marketing. "We have self-made people and we have highly-educated

employees. The team we have here is without doubt the best team I have ever worked with.

"Whether they ride or not these men and women get it. They are here late, they are cranking out the hours and the work. We chose to be based where we are, we've drawn from suppliers and manufacturers and from all this wealth of information that is all around us here. Our founders had a clear vision of what they wanted to do and this area has offered the bounty and the resources to be able to get that done."

Alta Motors specialises in the production of race-ready electric motorcycles and, after eight years of hard work and innovation, proved at Red Bull Straight Rhythm that the rest of us should start taking it seriously.

We visited Alta's HQ in Brisbane CA and sat down with co-founder and CTO Derek Dorresteyn to hear all about the origins of the company and, of course, to get our hands on the Redshift MX to have a play... >>



ALTA MOTORS REDSHIFT MX



DBR: Tell us the Alta story, the background of the company and how this all got started...

DD: "The seed of Alta was first planted after I was coming back from a supermoto test. We had hopped up the bike and in the process made it really peaky and not very fun to ride. I started talking to fellow co-founder Jeff Sand about the ability with an electric vehicle to do all of that tuning with software instead of cam shafts.

"We talked about how it would be interesting to hit reset and try something new and different. So we had that initial idea and eventually that blossomed into us realising that maybe the time is now to do this, maybe it has now become possible to build a competitive electric motorcycle. We knew that the avenue had been explored in the past but the products had never

really reached expectations.

"For us it was never about if it was possible to build an electric motorcycle, it was about whether it was possible to build a better motorcycle using an electric drive chain. I started building simulations on spreadsheets and looking at what parts were available to put something together. I found through my simulations that it was possible, however I found in the world of components that it wasn't possible – so that's what started us on the road of designing everything from scratch."

DBR: Can you talk about the early days of the company and the first few prototypes...

DD: "The early days were very exciting but things weren't nearly as structured as they are now. Nowadays we have a lot of different

disciplines and specialities under the roof but back when we started out it was only really four people. Out of those four we had experience in business, in engineering and in design. We worked with a few outside folks on the electrical side of things and we had the first prototype done in about six months.

"That first prototype did work pretty well. It didn't quite hit all the specs that we had set ourselves – it was a little heavier than we wanted it to be and it certainly wasn't very reliable – but it was functioning and we learned a lot in the process. We knew we had to make another one that fixed all the misses of the first as well as incorporating a bunch of new thinking and new technology.

"It's been six years since we first became a California corporation but we've actually been

With no clutch lever or cables the Redshift MX cockpit is neat and tidy



at this for more like eight years. Those first two years were most certainly not a full-time effort – it was more of just a night and weekend hobby of ours.”

DBR: What makes the Alta Redshift not only a better electric motorcycle but a better motocross bike in general?

DD: “What makes the Redshift MX superior is the control that you have of traction, the control of the application of torque to the rear wheel, the lack of transmission and the lack of shifting, the fact that you’re not chasing a torque curve – the motor makes peak torque at 0rpm so you always have peak torque available. When you combine all of that with a state-of-the-art chassis the ride quality is fundamentally different and better.”

DBR: What’s the top speed?

DD: “The stock bike in motocross trim is geared to go about 70 mph.”

DBR: And in terms of horse power?

DD: “We are putting out around 40bhp at the wheel, 36ft lbs of torque at the motor which equates to about 125ft lbs of torque at the countershaft sprocket and then somewhere around 500ft lbs of torque at the wheel.”

DBR: What’s the cost of one of these machines?

DD: “The Alta Redshift MX retails for \$14,995. It comes with an off-board charger that is capable of charging the bike from zero in around two-and-a-half hours.”

DBR: And what about the battery life?

DD: “The range is completely dependent on the use. We’ve engineered the bike to do 30 minutes plus two laps on the motocross track with a pro rider, that translates to about 45-50 minutes – or sometimes more –when in the hands of an intermediate rider and if you take it trail riding where the speeds are lower we regularly go two-and-a-half to three hours. The record is five hours of riding on slow, technical trails.”

DBR: Can you talk us through the technology?

DD: “Our chassis and the ergonomics of our bike are really the same to what people are familiar with. The weight balance front to rear, the stiffness of the chassis and all of that stuff is completely familiar to anyone that hops on our >>



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roost comes as standard...*

FIRST TEST!

**REDSHIFT RIDDEN, RAGGED
AND RATED**

I was able to take out a Redshift MX that had literally just come off the production line and give it a maiden voyage. We rode our silent assassins through the streets before taking them off-road at Alta's very own backyard playground.

During that short journey I took my time getting accustomed to the lack of noise as well as to the lack of clutch and gears. It was definitely very peculiar to begin with. However, I must say that feeling didn't last all too long once we made it to the track.

Now I'm not going to lie, my first few laps of the tight and technical turn track were littered with brain fart moments when I was convinced I had stalled the bike while braking hard into the corners. But that's just not possible on the Alta Redshift MX. The lack of engine noise was simply playing tricks on me.

After a while I learnt to read the silence and listen to the soft whine of the electric motor – plus the sounds of my awesome skids!

The Alta Redshift MX is the equivalent of a 250F four-stroke. Because of the weight of the batteries it's actually heavier than a conventional MX2 machine but I really didn't notice this on track. The bike didn't feel heavy whatsoever – in fact the Redshift felt very agile, nimble and incredibly easy to manoeuvre.

The only situation in which I noticed that the bike felt heavy was when I was picking it up from the ground. And no, I didn't drop it or crash it – because there's no engine fluids or oils or petrol or anything like that it's totally acceptable to lay your bike down on the ground when you take a break.

In terms of power and performance I was once again genuinely shocked at what the Alta is capable of. The Redshift comes with four pre-programmed map settings to switch between when you're on the go. To start I was in map setting one. The power came in very smoothly – to be honest I was expecting it to be a little punchier as I had heard about the instant torque from an electric motor.

It wasn't until I switched it to map setting four that I truly realised what people were talking about. The power was put to the ground instantly. It was a little wet and slick in places so it was a job in itself controlling the back end

coming out of the turns.

Because this is an electric motor you're not chasing any kind of torque curve, she just pulls and pulls and pulls. It was pretty amazing. When I found some open space and a long straight I opened her up to see what she had and boy did it feel like I was going fast.

It's worth noting that there is no gearbox and no shifting. This was definitely a little strange and some people may say that it takes some of the fun or some of the challenge out of the ride. Well I didn't feel that way on the day.

The lack of shifting allowed me to focus solely on my body positioning and technique when manoeuvring the tight and twisty corners of the track. It was definitely a good training method.

Overall I thought the bike handled pretty great. It felt very planted in the turns which inspired a lot of confidence and spurred me on to push harder and harder and lean it over further and further each time around. I think the best compliment I can give to the chassis and to the bike as a whole is that it really did feel just like a motocross machine. I felt as though I could've been riding any other brand of dirt bike, it just so happened that this one was yellow and had an electric motor.

The bike was very user-friendly. It has a three-stage start-up procedure – a turn of a key and two buttons to press – that was very easy to pick up. The dash was nice and simple with a clear battery power indicator as well as mileage and speed.

One of the only negatives is the overall battery life. I spent about an hour messing around on the bike before the battery started getting low and we had to call it a day which was a shame because I was having loads of fun. However, I suppose longer life that would come at the cost of more weight or less power.

The other major hurdle in the way of the Alta Redshift is the lack of brap and the missing smell of an internal combustion engine – things I think a lot of people will find hard to get over.

Is this the future? I'm not too sure but just think of the opportunities that silent electric motorcycles could open up – inner city racing, more tracks and less hassle and conflict with the wider world. The electric avenue most certainly has its advantages.

Now that I've ridden the Alta Redshift I can rest easy in knowing that if one day we can no longer shred our beloved fossil fuel-burning dirt scooters we still have the Alta to save us – and I'm just fine with that!



bike. Where the differences start to come in is in the drive train and how the throttle is connected to the rear wheel.

"Obviously we do not have an internal combustion engine and we also don't have a gearbox or a selectable gearbox, we have a gear reduction. So you basically start off in sixth gear and you ride around in sixth gear all the time – you never shift. The electric motor produces an incredible amount of torque and through the gear reduction and the final drive reduction we have about a 14-and-a-half to one gear reduction. So the torque that is at the rear tyre is really that sweet spot of torque that you get when you are in second gear and the front wheel is light and you can really squirt out of the corner.

"With our motor you're in that moment all the time and that's really magical you know. That's a brief explanation of what's happening between the motor and the rear wheel.

"The battery is actually a collection of smaller batteries that are put together to form a pack – we have a lot of product development, engineering and technology in that system. Our battery, to our knowledge, is the highest energy per pound in transportation.

"It's a very sophisticated system, it has a lot of built-in safety and a lot of built-in checks – things that keep the cells cool, things that monitor their voltage relative to each other and things that keep everything working in a safe way at its optimum output of power and energy. That's a DC battery running at a nominal of 300 volts and that's connected to the motor control.

"Now the motor control is a pretty sophisticated device, it takes that DC energy >>>



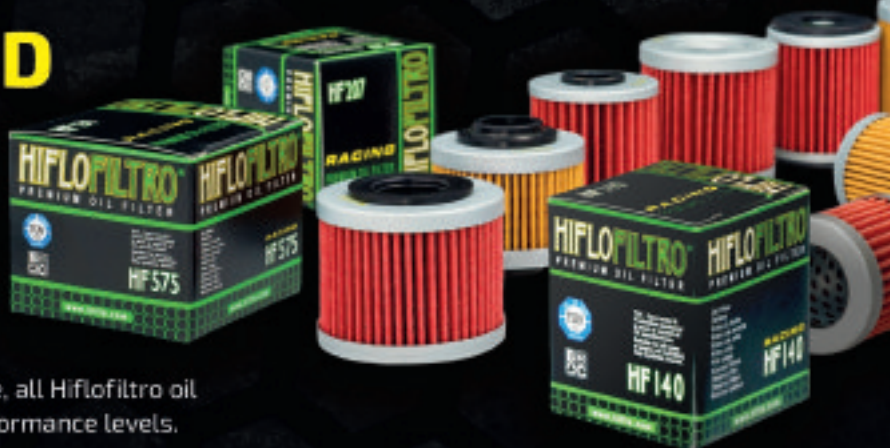
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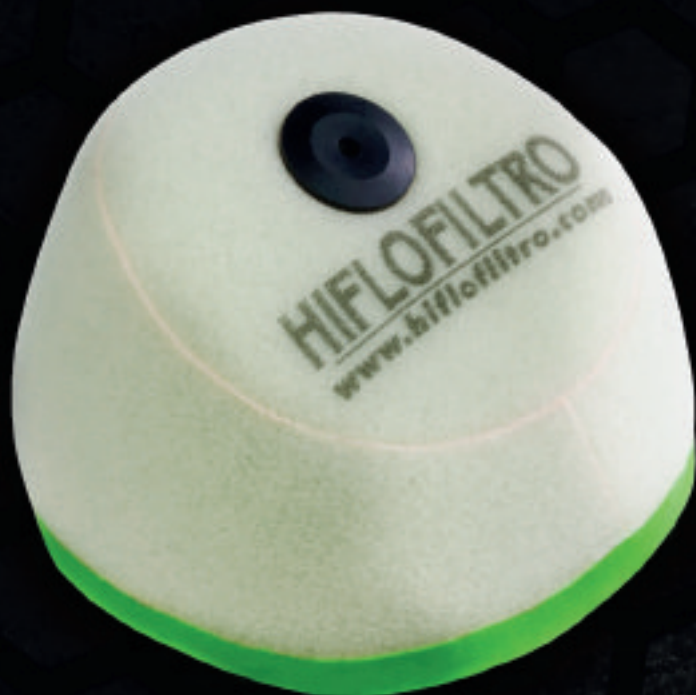


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DAZZLING DEBUT

RUNNING RIOT AT RED BULL STRAIGHT RHYTHM

Alta's enjoyed some great exposure this year with Josh Hill racing one to fourth at Red Bull Straight Rhythm and Kurt Nicoll enjoying considerable success in endurocross.

"Straight Rhythm was a big day for us," says Dorresteyn. "Our goal had really been to just be included in the event and to not suck and I think we did a lot more than just not sucking.

"We had been notified that we were eligible to race the event about six or eight weeks beforehand. We had been doing some testing with Josh Hill before that. We really liked Josh so I proposed that we do a test to determine if we thought we would be competitive and whether we should give it a shot.

"We did the test at one of the qualifier tracks – the bike performed pretty well but we knew we had a lot more work to do to really be competitive. Josh signed on at that point, it was probably four weeks before the event."

Getting the bike race-ready for an event like Straight Rhythm required a huge team effort.

"We did more test days out at Pala on the week of the event, mostly just working on suspension settings. At that point we hadn't really done any development for supercross suspension settings so that was an eye-opening week for our technical team.

"We got a lot of help from WP – we got A-kit suspension on the bike and tested a lot of new settings. The electric bike delivers power in a different way and requires different suspension settings compared to the gas bikes."

Despite the intensive testing programme the Alta team still weren't sure how the bike would perform.

"We had a lot of faith in the bike and in our technical team to make a lot of changes in the software and alter how the bike was reacting and behaving on the track. We continued to make subtle changes to the software throughout the day and by the time the races came we weren't really sure how we would do.

"We knew that we had qualified slightly slower than the other rider in our first match-up but we were still tweaking stuff and Josh was still getting up to speed. We won the first one, lost the second one and then we won the third race progressing us into the next round.

"That was a huge moment that exceeded everyone's true expectations of that night. We actually brought it home as far as the team was concerned."

and through a series of switches and a technique called pulse width modulation it turns that DC into three phases of AC and that's what is spinning the motor. The motor is a three-phase AC synchronous motor with permanent magnets in it. The permanent magnets allow the motor to get very high torque density and the AC allows us to run very efficiently over a torque speed range. The magic is really in the software that is controlling that motor control.

"Between the throttle signal and the rear wheel it's that software and how it turns that DC power into AC power at various frequencies. So you've got speed and torque being controlled – the throttle is actually a direct torque control but speed is also a function.

"There's a lot of magic in how the bike feels in low traction situations, off jumps and accelerating out of corners. We've literally

put hundreds of hours into testing and refining that.

"The verdict is that it feels amazing and the bike is very responsive. It behaves very similarly to the internal combustion engine – you have that same control in the air to change the attitude of the bike, the responsiveness is there and I guess the proof of that for us came at Straight Rhythm and particularly Josh Hill's performance through the whoops. That's technically the hardest thing to do and in my mind we were doing that better than anyone else."

DBR: When can we expect the bikes to arrive in the UK?

DD: "We haven't nailed down exactly when we are going to enter the UK market but we will begin shipping bikes into Europe in the second quarter of 2017."

>>

Having no clutch to worry about is actually more fun than it sounds



There's even a flat track version of Alta's e-bike

DBR: What does the future hold for Alta?

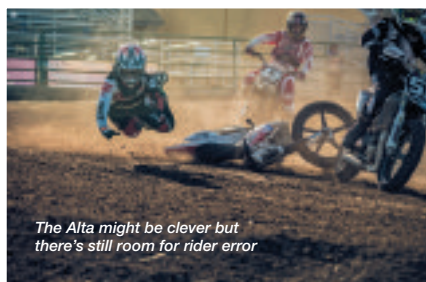
DD: "We just started shipping bikes to customers in August. We've got a huge backlog of orders and we are going to be working pretty much halfway through next year filling that backlog which is an exciting thing for us. And, of course, we are going to do more racing."

"Racing is the finest showcase that there is. There's no denying when something is good or bad, it's all about the results. Obviously we did Straight Rhythm this year, we did three [endurocross] events with Kurt Nicoll riding in the Vet class – we won the first round, came second in the second one and second in the third."

"We are also working really hard to be allowed to race in some of the more prestigious motocross and supercross races. Currently we are written out of the rules so we also have our sights set on some of the other events that we are allowed to race in such as AMA supermoto, some of the amateur racing at Loretta's and Mammoth as well as various flat track events which we are also allowed to race in."

DBR: Is the future electric?

DD: "I think the electric motocross bike is part of the future of the sport. We are not here to take anything away from anybody or take any product's place out there. We are just here to make a better motorcycle and if we can continue to do that we may see more Altas out there than we do now and in my book that's success for us."



The Alta might be clever but there's still room for rider error



This is the exact bike that Josh Hill raced at Straight Rhythm...

Kurt Nicoll has used his years of experience to help Alta get the Redshift MX right



TooFast Max adds his own braaps to help the Alta shoot out of a berm



STAR TURNS

DEVELOPING THE ALTA

Kurt Nicoll and Josh Hill have helped develop the bike and raise the company's profile but the testing and development programme was already well under way before the pair came on board.

"It started with Dennis Stapleton and Kris Keefer," explains Bekefy. "Those guys are killer riders but also great test and development riders too. This company has always endeavoured to put the best foot forward in terms of competition and development and having Stapleton and Keefer helped us to do that.

"And now this next wave – Nicoll and Hill – and we even go up to Oregon to race flat track with Andy DiBrino. We come home with a ton of set-up data, settings for the chassis and the map tuning. Because of that we know how to race short track, we know how to put together a power package and maps that work on clay, we know suspension settings from an event like Straight Rhythm if we were going to race a supercross.

"Kurt has given us a ton of feedback on endurocross and how to build the bike and the maps to allow him to be successful and help earn him every little advantage that he can gain out of the bike.

"So this development process is two-fold. We develop the bikes to enable these guys to be successful in their racing and to cater these bikes and the packages to their tastes.

"At the same time it is very beneficial for us that they do well and that they are good at development but we also get to come home with a ton of data for our production bikes, we get to form new relationships with companies like WP, we get new map settings and we gain an understanding on how to tailor these packages. Development with these guys is key."



Tommy's AX title hunt is derailed by a knee injury

NEWS! NEWS! NEWS!

OUR MONTHLY LOOK AT ALL THAT'S HIP, HOT AND HAPPENING IN THE OFF-ROAD UNIVERSE . . .

Words by Sean Lawless

New Year, new Newshound! Actually, it's more a case of fill-in Newshound as the Borders Collie – that's Bryan MacKenzie in case you didn't know – has ducked out on his doggy duties this month.

After spending the previous 20-plus festive periods training like a madman to be ready for the forthcoming season I reckon the recently-retired Irn Bry's probably recovering from a long overdue Hogmanay Bucky blow-out and if he is who can blame him?

Of course, he could also have found himself trapped in an MX-themed Groundhog Day and he's currently out on his roadie looking for single shoes, wiping his bum on a sock or turning laps at his Duns track.

Whatever the reason I'm sure that Deep Fry,

wife Ashley and new nipper Heidi had a brilliant first family Christmas together before he gets down to the serious job of managing Team Green's AX efforts.

And while I'm on the subject...

By the time you read this we'll already be one round into the 2017 Arenacross Tour and, at the time of writing, we're also already one man down. The bad news is that Tommy Searle crocked himself testing for AX over in sunny California and the resulting knee injury means he'll miss the full series.

That sucks more than Hetty Hoover (that's a real thing – Google it) but the series, now entering its fifth year, is bigger than just one man and there's still a full line-up of loopers who'll be hanging it out indoors. Who will win the whole shooting match is anyone's guess

but going on the European SX races at the back end of last year the two men in form are defending champ Thomas Ramette and sulky chops Cedric Soubeyras.

Initially all three previous champs – Adam Chatfield, Fabien Izoird and double winner Ramette – were due to contest the 2017 tour but an injury punted fab Fab out of the reckoning. The knock-on effect saw Adam jump ship from his Fro Systems team to take a ride on a Buildbase Honda which opened up when the Frenchman got hurt, all of which really put the – wait for it – Chat among the pigeons! Sorry...

The beauty of arenacross is it's so hard to call. You'd like to think the cream will always rise to the top and it generally does but on the tight and technical tracks even the best riders



are only one bad start away from the LCQ (or one hard pass away from A&E).

In fact, the only way you could make AX anymore exciting – other than live sniper fire and Ben Hur-style blades on the wheel spindles – would be, say, if someone like, say, Billy MacKenzie got, say, a wildcard ride at somewhere like, say, his home round in Glasgow.

What's that? He has?

Yep, Billiam will team up with Buildbase Honda for a one-off ride at the SSE Hydro this Saturday (January 14) and, hoots mon, the news has really put some lead in my lipstick! Unpredictable, incendiary and always exciting, Billy should ensure tickets out-sell even faster than that pish-coloured pop and Tunnocks Teacakes that are so

beloved by our Caledonian cousins.

Time for some Stateside news now and on the same night it all kicked off in Manchester Arena, approximately 5283 miles across the pond the Monster Energy Supercross Championship got under way in Anaheim California.

With the opening round already done and dusted I'm on a hiding to nothing predicting the winner but this Newshound is no scaredy cat so I'm calling it Ken Roczen from Marvin Musquin from Ryan Dungey. And even if I'm wrong – and it has been known to happen – barring injuries I think those three will be the guys fighting for podiums and the title by the time the series signs off in Vegas on May 6.

Just as with AX there are a ton of

>>



DAKAR DUSTDOWN

A QUICK CATCH UP OF WHAT'S GOING DOWN IN SOUTH AMERICA...

Words by **Robert Lynn**

It's full steam ahead for January as the Dakar Rally rips its way through South America. Dominating our off-road headlines for the majority of the month it's one heck of a race and one heck of a challenge. From the pros trying to win the thing to the hobby guys just trying to survive, it's a special deal and sits on most enduro rider's bucket list.

As we go to print it's still very early days in what is promising to be a very tough two weeks. Top players like Toby Price and Joan Barreda have shown their hand with stage wins aplenty while it was French privateer Xavier De Soultrait who won the opening stage.

Prior to the start of the rally Marc Coma was promising a difficult affair. As Dakar's new Sporting Director he was unimpressed by the lack of serious navigation in recent editions and has set about fixing that. As one of the masters in the art of navigation, it's going to be very interesting to see how more important the road book becomes.

As he announced major changes to the 2017 event, he admitted, "I've spent a year rediscovering an event I thought I knew inside out. This year will be a test by fire."

Those changes for 144 bike entrants covering 8818kms in the 2017 Dakar are many. They include increased difficulty in navigation with a new control of waypoints on the road books – no more direction arrows – and seven stages with the special longer than 400kms, including two longer than 500kms. That's 500kms racing flat out kids!

Of the 12 stages six will be above 3000 metres of altitude, with highest point peaking at a whopping 4800m. Altitude is sure going to be an issue. And as Coma puts it, "Dakar 2017 will be a very interesting game!"

Strongly represented KTM chase their 16th consecutive victory in the rally with Toby Price, Sam Sunderland, Matthias Walkner and Laia Sanz. Honda, still looking that elusive win since their return, have Joan Barreda, Paulo Gonçalves, Ricky Brabec and Michael Metge. Yamaha and Sherco will all play an important factor too along with privateers like Stefan Svitko – who was runner-up in 2016.

Naturally with Sam Sunderland challenging for top honours there's British interest to cheer for at the pointy end of the results but there's also Lyndon Poskitt, David Watson and Kurt Burroughs to keep an eye on too. Poskitt is in the Malle Moto (no assistance) category and a favourite for the win there too.



BLAST OFF!

HAWKSTONE INTERNATIONAL ON HORIZON...

With the ratherawesome.com AX Tour already in full swing it's now only a few weeks until Hawkstone Park hosts its annual pre-season shindig aka the Be Wiser 2017 Hawkstone International.

With a fairly awesome line-up already confirmed – and more star signings on the way – the February 5 one-dayer might be the only chance you get to see British champions Adam Sterry, Shaun Simpson, Arnaud Tonus, Kevin Strijbos and Brad Anderson racing on the same bill as Max Anstie, Gautier Paulin, Arminas Jasikonas, Jake Nicholls, Jeremy Seewer, Hunter Lawrence, Zach Pichon, Jake Shipton and Bas Vaessen in the UK this year.

As well as all those ace pro racers who'll be battling it out in MX1 and MX2 there'll also be a full field of up n' comers in the MX2 division that stars youth hotshots including Joel Rizzi, Callum Crossland, Declan Hunter, Jake Edey and fast female Kathryn Booth. All in all it's gonna be an ace day at the races but wrap up warm because it is February after all...

The 2017 Hawkstone International costs just £30 to get in which includes a FREE programme, FREE parking, FREE access to the pits and – if you like to get close to the action like us – FREE sand in your hair. Accompanied children aged 14 n' under get in for FREE too.

To take advantage of all these fabulous freebies – and see some of the world's fastest motocross racers battle it out around one of the world's most brutal sand tracks – then you need to stick SY4 4NA in your SatNavs or pick up and follow the Hawkstone MX signs you should find on both the A53 and A49 around 10 miles north east of Shrewsbury.



UK GETS EXTREME

BRITISH EXTREME SERIES KICKS OFF

Burn off that Christmas excess at the opening round of the 2017 ACU Extreme Enduro Championship. The series gets underway with the Eddys Xtreme at Tong on Saturday January 15.

Ensuring round one gets off to the best possible start Paul Edmondson has been hard at work grafting out an extreme enduro course fit for a King – a king called Graham Jarvis. And he won't be alone either with new team-mate Billy Bolt and Danny McCanney both racing too.

For more information drop Fast Eddy an email on fasteddyracing@hotmail.com or call 01543 370070 or 07889 924560 right now...

HOT DATES!

2017 ACU Extreme Enduro Championship

Round 1	January 15	Eddys Xtreme, Tong
Round 2	February 5	Eddys Xtreme, Cowm Quarry
Round 3	February 26	Eds of the Valley, Mid Wales
Round 4	April 23	Extreme Ravines, Yorkshire
Round 5	August 19	H20 Extreme Classic

K-Roc starts A1 as favourite to win!



variables but for now I'm going with my gut feeling. Sure, K-Roc has switched to a new bike with the HRC team, Musquin's in only his second year on a 450 and The Diesel missed most of the outdoor season through injury but it's a long season and you've got to be up front week-in, week-out and they're the men I reckon can do it.

One thing's for sure – they're won't be a Bubba or a Baby Bubba popping their cork in Sin City. Neither former champ James Stewart or his little bro Malcolm were able to pull together a deal good enough to enable them to get the job done and – again, at the time of writing – neither are on the start list for Anaheim 1.

Officer Stewart's no-show isn't all that surprising TBH. He's like the contents of my post-Chrimbo fridge – past his best – and as a two-time champion it must stick in his throat knowing he's only going somewhere to make up the numbers. Bubba's crashed too hard, too often and surely must be ready to finally call it a day and move onto an unsuccessful career in NASCAR racing.

Malc, on the other hand, really should be racing. After all, he's the reigning East Coast 250SX champ and if his West Coast equivalent Cooper Webb can get a 450 ride then why shouldn't he?

Scottish favourite Dean Wilson will be behind the startgate at Anaheim but, after



Marvin Musquin can put it on the podium at any given AMA SX round this spring



Toby Price is in the hunt for a second Dakar win as DBR goes to print

an injury-hit term with Red Bull KTM, he'll be rocking up on a privateer Yamaha. His fans are hoping he'll get a fill-in ride on a competitive team as soon as someone inevitably picks up an injury but with the news that Jake Weimer's taking over from Justin Barcia at JGR Suzuki – who's only gone done broke his wrist – it seems Deano isn't at the front of that particular queue.

This year's series will see the races run over a set time duration (just like the outdoors) rather than a set number of laps which "feverishly checks Bry Mac's notes" is the most dramatic change to the SX structure since it switched to one Main Event in the '80s.

Will it make a big difference? I'm struggling

to see how but, hey, a change is as good as a rest...

Time to take it outside now and word on the street – or in the forest – is that Alex Snow is forsaking motocross for the British Enduro Championship. With decent deals hard to come by Snowy's following a path that MXGP rider Christophe Charlier has also chosen for 2017.

There are plenty of MX riders who've become winning woods warriors – Nathan Watson springs to mind – and we wish Alex well in his new career once he's finished the AX Tour where he's racing for Dave Thorpe's Keystone Honda team.

Down in Spain the season kicks off with the brand new Redsand International which runs

from January 16 to 22 where the gazillion-Euro prize-purse has proved to be a very juicy carrot for some of the main GP contenders.

Max Nagl, Gautier Paulin, Max Anstie, Jake Nicholls, Shaun Simpson, Jordi Tixier, Jeremy Seewer, Thomas Covington, Adam Sterry and Conrad Mewse are just a few of the riders who'll be in action.

The major Italian-based teams – HRC Gariboldi with Tim Gajser and Evgeny Bobryshev, De Carli KTM with Tony Cairoli and Glenn Coldenhoff, Rinaldi Yamaha with Romain Febvre and Jeremy Van Horebeek – all seem to be concentrating on the three-round Internazionali d'Italia but pretty much everyone else will head north from Espana for the >>



BOLT INTO THE BLUE

BILLY BOLTS JOINS JARVIS AT HUSQVARNA

Rising Hard Enduro talent Billy Bolt has been signed by Husqvarna to join Graham Jarvis as part of their extreme team for 2017.

Turning heads in 2016 with a top five result at Erzberg, along with other impressive rides, Bolt has been snapped.

"I'm excited to be part of the Rockstar Energy Husqvarna. I can't wait for the new season to begin and can't thank Rockstar Energy Husqvarna enough for giving me the opportunity to take my career to a whole new level as a Husqvarna Factory rider.

"I still need to learn a lot but I'm glad I'm surrounded by the right people to help me do that. It's also an honour to be racing alongside Graham."



By the time you read this we'll know who's won round one of the AX Tour – who's your money on?

Hawkstone International on February 5.

From there for the favoured few it's a mere hop, skip and double jump to Qatar for the opening GP of the year on February 24/25 while the first of the major domestic championships – the Michelin MX Nationals – opens for business on March 4/5 at Brampton, followed a week later by the first Maxxis round at Culham.

The Maxxis is, of course, playing host to a four-round British Two-Stroke series this season with Lewis Gregory, Mike Kras and – surprisingly – Lewis Trickett all going for gold on pre-mixers. We've also heard a sniff that Brad Anderson is going to double up, racing

the Maxxis MX1 class and the two-smoker division. That means four motos when both classes are staged on the same day! Still, they breed 'em tough oop narth...

Regrettably, this month's Newshound ends on a serious note.

There's a bit of EU legislation currently hovering like the Angel of Death over motorsport in the UK which will require everyone using motorised transport to have third party damage and injury insurance.

The UK insurance industry's collective arse has, naturally, nipped up tighter than Kim Kardashian's yoga pants at the thought of the potential claim turndado heading its way

and told the Government to stick it where the sun don't shine (which, among other places, also happens to be inside Kim Kardashian's yoga pants).

Before you start to panic take a deep breath and consider the situation. Motorsports – and I'm not just talking motocross – is a massive moolah-maker for the UK economy so I reckon the whole thing will either blow over or an acceptable compromise will be reached.

Okay, that's yer lot. Normal skinny Scottish service will be resumed next month. In the meantime, I'm off to do some further research on Kim Kardashian's yoga pants...





Max Nagl is super psyched to be racing the Redsand MX Park International at the end of January

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TONY CAIROLI

A NEW YEAR GREETING FROM THE EIGHT-TIME WORLD CHAMP AND HIS FIANCÉE JILL...

Ciao DBR readers, here we are in 2017! I hope that it was a good end of year for you and that the New Year has started well with plenty of energy and ideas as to what you fancy doing in the next 12 months!

The last days of the year were busy for me like always with my fiancée Jill preparing the presents for our friends' kids and me organising the NYE party with our neighbours. We decided to spend the Christmas period with our family in Sicily so we went down for a couple of days enjoying the super nice weather they were experiencing down there.

Christmas in Sicily means food – lots of food! It was very good as always and very traditional with my older sister preparing it for all of us. The table must be full of the good stuff, with certain things that should never be missed – like dried sheep cheese that gets grated on the top of the pasta.

One of my favorites is pasta Alla Norma – a huge plate of pasta seasoned with tomato sauce, fried eggplants and dusted with a massive snowfall of grated cheese. You just can't understand how good it is until you've tried an authentic plate of this kind of pasta! I love pasta and it's an important part of my diet. I burn a lot of calories because I'm always doing some sport or other and this allows me to eat a little bit more than most people, so a good plate of pasta is never missing from my table!

While it's important for everyone to eat well and healthily, as motocross riders we need to feed our bodies with the right amounts of calories, carbohydrates, proteins and so on. Don't forget to always eat lots of fruit and veggies that will give you the right amount of vitamins, fibre and mineral salts. The old saying goes 'you are what you eat' and I think that is true, so eat good and eat right!

While in Sicily we visited the family and also took time to see some very nice spots – hiking up a mountain (the Monte Ilice which is close to mount Etna) from where the views were truly fantastic! It's amazing to keep discovering how beautiful the world around us can be even without needing to be far away from our homes. Italy, I have to say, is full of incredible places like that.

Back home I've spent some very funny days with my best friends doing plenty of sport. We have been cycling a lot with my brand new Trek mountain bike around my house and we have also been doing a lot of enduro. One day on Gran Sasso – one of the nicest mountains in central Italy – we rode right up until we hit the snow! You can imagine how much fun that was! The two last days of the year were spent at my place with MX riders Alessandro Lupino, Joakin Furbetta and Emilio Scuteri doing what we do best! What a nice way to close a tough but in the end, I have to say, good year!

The end of a year also brings time for reflection and is the ideal time to understand what worked well and what did not. The beginning of a New

Year is also the right time to make some good resolutions. What are yours? I will do my best, as always, to achieve my goals and at the end of the season one of the biggest of my life will happen, my wedding with Jill.

Back to the now and the first race of the year is already so close! By the time the next issue comes out I'll have already finished testing, the last part of my physical preparation, the photo shoots and at least two or three races of the Internazionali d'Italia Championship.

This this year it will be hosted on my home track Malagrotta during the first weekend of February and then it's time to leave for Qatar and Indonesia – a brand new venue for all of us. Time is rolling so fast that we almost didn't realise that the past season was over that a new one is starting and this time it will be the longest ever with 19 Grand Prix and the Motocross of the Nations in the UK at the end – a real marathon!

So now its time again to put my race clothes on and to go have some fun on my track, preparing for the big battle of 2017! I hope that in this New Year all your dreams turn into reality and all your efforts into great achievements! May the New Year bring joy, peace and happiness to all of you! A presto amici!

A stylized signature of Tony Cairoli in black ink.



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BRYAN MACKENZIE



SINCE HE'S RETIRED FROM RACING IRN BRY'S GOT ALL POLITICAL AND THAT...

Happy New Year one and all live long and prosper and all that, yada, yada, yada!

I hope you had a good one and kicked the arse right out of it! But the good times are behind us for now and it's into the New Year with the head down as we all have reset ambitions, goals and ideals with a rejuvenation of energy to succeed at them.

So that's me done my positive upbeat bit for the new year and I don't mean to bring down the tone of the energised vibe you're all riding but I've been watching this thing about the 'Death of motorsport' online since it was brought to my attention last month. Now, I don't ever pay any real attention to politics or anything like that on a normal day-to-day basis but this one pricked my ears up when I seen real-world abbreviated words with muscle, like, HM Government etc along side the words motorsport/ motocross. I was compelled to look.

So, what the F is going on? Basically, someone somewhere in the EU is trying to stop the party because of an exposed grey area in motor insurance and stuff.

Did you hear how that movement for rule change came about?

The story goes that a Slovenian man (Mr Vnuk) was working on a farm in a barn up a ladder which got reversed into by a tractor with a trailer. The guy

fell and hurt himself. All he probably really needed was a new tampon and a bar lunch but such is the way of the world he went after compo. But, as the tractor was reversing the trailer into the barn to store it and not in fact doing jobs the insurance company declined the payout as the farm policy only insured it while at 'work'. To be honest, you have to feel a wee bit for Mr Slovenia and sure as sh*t someone did and took the grey area of the insurance policy exposed and kicked it up the court system into the European Court of Justice.

So, long story short, someone decided that they wanted anything propelled by a motor to have third party accident and injury cover to cover all possible third-party accidents in all places and at all times which ranges from Tractors to F1 race cars, British Superbike and golf buggies, mobility scooters, sit own lawn-mowers and even motor assisted bicycles etc. That includes all forms of motocross too, by the way.

This would mean that anything remotely mechanically powered would need insurance (just like your car/van) at all times (Even SORN vehicles) whether it be in your garden, on your own land or at a private practice/race track making motorsport completely uninsurable, therefore, if you were to ride/drive any at anytime you'd be breaking the law (you'd have no insurance). Total horse sh*t, I know.

Sadly while the UK remains a member of the EU, the Government must implement the Directive

which will affect motorsport across the country until we get out (Brexit and all that) but that could be around 2020 by the time that happens.

Fighting our corner along side us, though, is the 50 year-old man with 10 year old hair, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Boris Johnson MP. That's got to count for at least something. He wrote in 'The Telegraph' arguing that the ruling on compulsory motor insurance for any mechanically propelled vehicle is "insane" and that "every free-born Brit (has the right) to pootle blissfully on his own quad bike on his own private land". Yes, BJ! My man! Somebody bump knuckles with that lad and get him two free tickets to the Hawkstone International!

There is a petition you can sign to help show the numbers of people that this would affect and to try add weight behind the power against this thing asking that HM Government under no circumstances implements the 'Vnuk' judgement in a way that includes any motor and motorcycle sport activities – www.fightvnuk.co.uk.

I've changed my vote for president. I'm going for Boris!

R. J. Vnuk
#121

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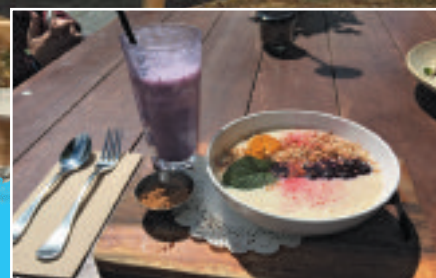
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STEVE HOLCOMBE

BACK IN BLIGHTY (FOR NOW) AND BURSTING TO GET BACK IN THE SADDLE AFTER A WELL-EARNED CHRISTMAS BREAK IN NEW ZEALAND STEVIE'S ALL SYSTEMS GO AS HE STARTS TO PREPARE FOR THE SEASON AHEAD...

Happy New Year everyone! Hope you're all ready to get stuck into 2017. As much as I'm looking forward to the new season, I can't believe it's already 2017. I guess time really does fly when you're having fun!

Switching off, spending just about every day on my mountain bike and generally enjoying the truly beautiful scenery in and around Queenstown in New Zealand's South Island was an amazing way to end 2016. It was everything I hoped it would be, and well worth the long journey to the other side of the world. But now I'm back in Blighty, head down, thermals on and gearing up for the long season ahead.

My now annual (I've been twice) trip to New Zealand is my end-of-year treat to myself. I'm not one for spa hotels or days on end sitting on a beach sunning myself, my thing is getting away on two-wheels. I could do it much closer to home but there's a magic and mystery about New Zealand that's hard to explain. It's an incredible place.

As I write this I'm back in the UK (have been for a week or so) packing my bags in readiness for a road-trip to Italy. First up I'll call into the factory to pick up my new season training bike, catch up with everyone there and then meet up with my team mate Alex Salvini. We're going to head

to Spain then for three weeks of riding, before returning to Italy for a little while. I spent a good amount of time living and training with Alex at the start of last year and I'm planning to do the same again this year... I just haven't explained to Alex yet that's what I'm hoping to do!

Nothing's set in stone yet but I'm planning on staying out in Italy and Spain until the middle of the year, back in the UK somewhere around the start of July. Being based in Italy, and being able to get to Spain easily, will allow me to do all the training and testing I need. Importantly, I'll be much closer to the factory than if I was living in the UK. With an extended world championship calendar, I've decided that I'm not going to compete in any national championship, just picking out a few races in Italy and France.

Although the world championship doesn't start until the end of March it'll soon be here. Between then and now I have plenty of riding, training and testing to do, and I can't wait. Being off a bike for five weeks has really done what I hoped it would – it's made me really want to get back to it. Switching off from thinking too much about racing has definitely been a good thing. Now I'm ready to get stuck in again.

As you'll likely have guessed cycling forms a big part of my off enduro bike training. In New Zealand it was mostly mountain biking, more recently it's been crisp morning rides on my

road bike. There'll be plenty more miles covered on different bikes in the coming months, which together with plenty of time on my Beta 300 should see me somewhere near ready for the first round in Finland.

When I say somewhere near ready I don't mean that I'm leaving things up to chance. What I mean is that my fitness will nearly be at 100 per cent. I'm a firm believer in not being too ready for the first race as there's a long season ahead, with a lot of racing to be done. Last year I knew I wasn't in my absolute best shape for the first round of the series. Getting a little stronger as each of the following rounds of the series rolled by certainly worked well for me.

I'm genuinely looking forward to 2017. Last year was an incredible season for me, my first as a full-time rider. Despite the successes I had I know there's still a lot more for me to learn and experience. But I'm also much more aware of what lies ahead.

The new class structure is a big change. The only thing anyone really knows is that competition is going to be extremely close. I can't wait...

Enjoy the Ride.

Steve.

Handwritten signature: Steve #70

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DANIEL GROVE



OUR FACTORY SPECTATOR GETS ALL POLITICAL AND STUFF...

I'm a big believer in letting people do what the hell they like as long as it makes them happy and providing that it's not detrimental to anyone else.

If people want to get in a serious amount of debt to turn up at a practice track in a Sprinter converted into a motorhome with two identical bikes, ride five laps and then pull out of their session for a recovery shake under their awning then that's fine. Or on the other hand if people can only afford a trailer to hitch on their car but they burn through a couple of gallons of fuel on a practice day, then fair play to them.

I know who I'll have more respect for but as long as there are wheels are turning around motocross tracks across the country then we should all be happy because if less people were to ride, it would make our own riding more expensive!

The thing that links these two types of riders is that fact that they're there on their own accord and they've made their own minds up that they want to be there. Their mates are probably at the track too but that's where the influence of others stops when it comes to people riding motocross.

It's safe to say that 2016 was a bit of a crazy year for the UK. Starting with the Hawkstone International going off in dry conditions we later went on to Brexit our asses and then the US went and got an unlikely president. So, I'm going down the road of linking these events and also compare them but the actual comparison has no involvement of the event itself. What am I talking about? Well, the biggest development for me in 2016 which is slowly coming to the fore is 'fake news'.

If you're not entirely sure what fake news is, well, it's exactly what it's called. It's news, that is fake. It's made up, total nonsense although the headline could be something that everyone is aware of but it features totally made up content. The websites that run these 'stories' feature a sh*t tonne of adverts and pop ups that you'll struggle to get off your screen when you open it and guess what happens when you click through onto this site... someone somewhere has just made some money. Maybe only a few pence, but how many users does Facebook have? 1.79 billion! Pennies make pounds innit...

If you're going to read news stories, articles, reviews, anything online, just make sure that it comes from a respected source. It's exactly the same offline, if a stranger stops you in the street and shares their views with you are you going to believe or care about what they say? If someone shares or comments on something that can influence someone, whether it's about the Hawkstone Hill being included at the International or a story dragged up about Donald Trump from the '80s where he accidentally drove over a cat, then why should that change whether you want to go and spectate or vote or not vote for a particular person.

We voted for UK independence because the grass was supposedly greener yet it seems like one person can write something somewhere on the internet that goes viral and then all of a sudden there are thousands of people believing in the nonsense that's been posted. What's independent about that?

I'll never forget making a coffee at work the day after we voted to leave the EU and seeing Nigel Farage on TV when he was questioned on the 'Vote Leave' campaign around the £350 million that would go to the NHS instead of the EU if we left to which he replied 'that was a mistake'. Oh, that's alright then! I wonder how many people would have voted to leave for this reason alone... They even had buses driving around London with this message on the sides! What a joke and also 'fake'.

This was then followed by Google getting bombarded with searches for 'what is the eu' and 'what is brexit' the day after the election and I don't for a second think that this was done by people that voted to stay...

The cherry on the cake was that all the leaders of the Vote Leave campaign actually stood down so it kinda shows that they were about as prepared for it as the rest of the UK.

So it's a bit clearer after we left that some people didn't really know what they were voting for and were influenced by this 'fake news', shared by their friends and I'd go out on a limb and say that some people didn't even read the article they just saw the headlines which influenced them and it

helped them make their decision. Which is totally wrong as I'm hoping you'll agree but I won't be offended if you don't. But I see comments online about various motocross events which makes other people change their mind about going which just hurts the sport.

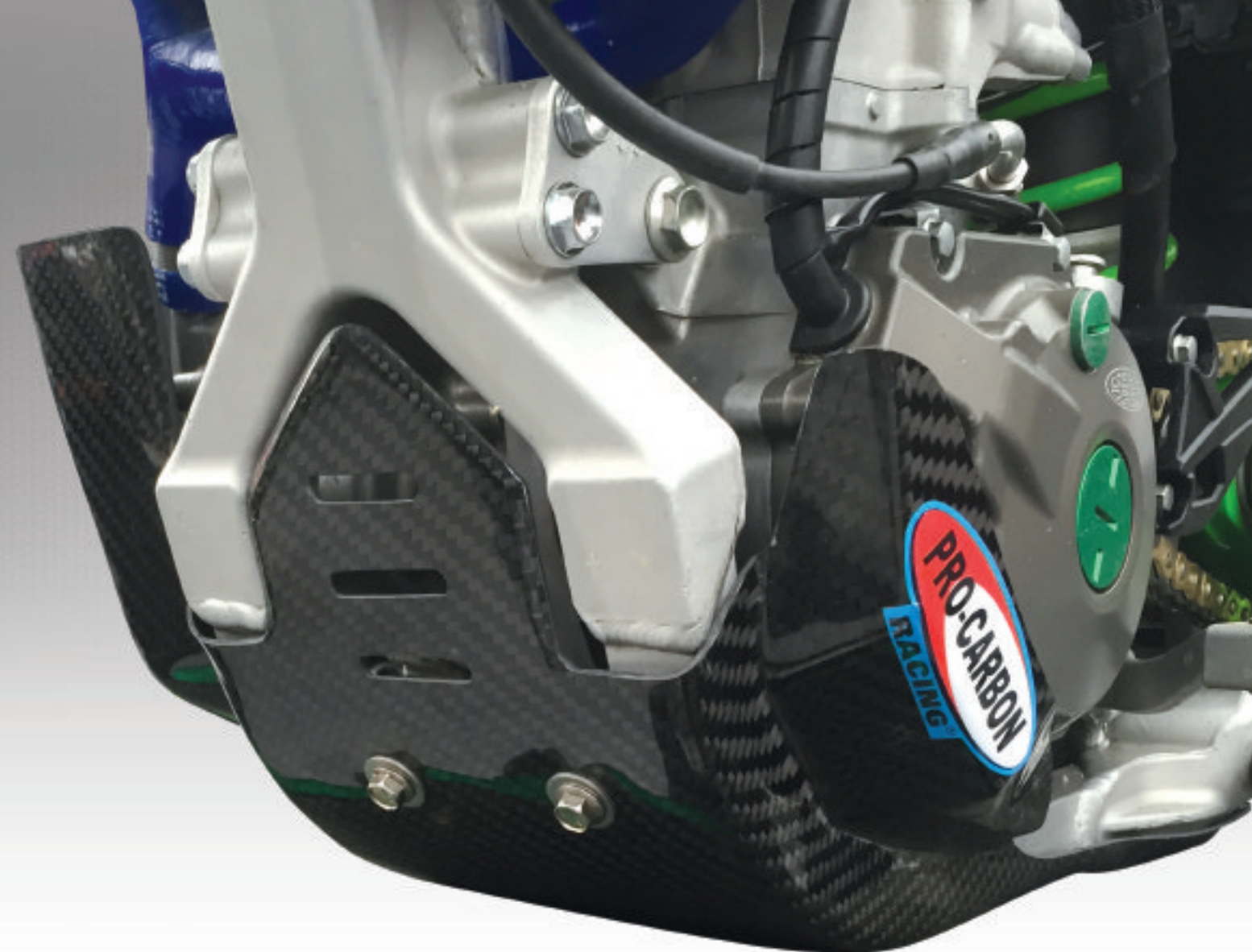
I'm in no way pretending to be a political expert but if some random guy sat in his pants can create a 'story' then you may as well believe everything I say as I'm actually a real human being that gets outside and sees and does things. If I see something I like I'll buy it. I don't buy something because one of my buddies has it. If I want to ride or race somewhere I'll just get up and go.

What we can all collectively do is continue to buy bikes (new and used), riding them, fixing them, buying riding gear, watching race meetings, but most of all, ensure that we keep our heads screwed on through 2017 and beyond.

If you don't attend a race meeting – to watch or race – that's fine, but if you take to social media to slate the track or the admission fee then you're dragging the sport down and we'll be better off without you if you fancy pursuing something else. By all means if you were there, crack on and throw your opinion around but remember that before you went you could have found out the weather forecast and the cost to get in.

The motocross community is small enough already so having people already involved in it dragging it down hardly paints a positive picture to those on the outside. There's a small motocross industry in this country doing their best to promote the sport the right way however if you're reading this and you race or ride dirt bikes or attend any form of dirt bike event then you're helping the sport tick over and grow which we're all responsible for so bear that in mind before sharing your own views or worse still, sharing someone else's made up nonsense.

Daniel Grove



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JAKE NICHOLLS

AFTER A MONTH OFF WHILE HE REMOVED TAPE FROM HIS NIPPLES OUR HOME-GROWN HERO IS BACK...

I hope you all enjoyed some time off over the festive period and plenty of time at the tracks. I certainly have been as everything is gearing up much earlier this coming season. My first race is set to be January 22 down in Spain and I'm excited to say I will be racing Hawkstone International as well. Then there's a free weekend to iron a few things out if need be and get the final bits and pieces together before the first GP of the year in Qatar.

I'm pleased to say I've got a deal with Roger again to compete in all of the GPs. It will be nice to be in the same environment as this season and it will make the start of the season that much calmer.

Also I'm excited to be back on orange again – can't beat the orange gals. The Huskys have done me proud this year and I absolutely love them – as many of you know the KTM and husky are very similar so the transition has been pretty straightforward.

Since I last wrote (he means actually got his column in on time – Sutti) it's all been pretty steady apart from doing the Paris Lille Supercross which was a proper blast. I got some suspension the night before we left for Lille so I hadn't got a chance to try it.

Lewis Tombs and I left on 5am Friday and met Ian Browne – who was my mechanic for the weekend – at the stadium as he was already in Belgium working. I signed on and moped around a bit aimlessly as we thought there was technical etc but there was really no need to be there. It was good to walk the track and watch some of the top 450 guys ride the track though.

When I walked it I was pretty shocked with how steep everything was and how sticky the

clay was. The triple looked tough straight out of a corner which made me nervous as I was at full off-season weight (85kg) and I was riding a top-end powered 250! But that afternoon we drove a couple hours away to some pointless indoor track called SX Concepts – what a load of squid that was.

Man it was dangerous and so fast, skimming concrete pylons while hooking fourth gear. Not my cup of tea but it did us a favour by not having to clean the bike. The suspension felt quite hard round there but to be fair I think the minibike nationals have bigger jumps so it wasn't a fair test.

Practice the next day actually went okay. The whole night did to be honest. I haven't enjoyed racing this much in years, I was riding pretty fast around the whole track apart from the whoops where I just couldn't keep my speed up. I was wondering why I could carry so much more speed into the turns than some of the guys but by the second night I understood why – my suspension was way too soft for the whoops.

I could get away with it around the rest of the track as the rhythms I was doing weren't the biggest but it killed me in the whoops which was kind of the end of my second night as I holed the heat race which got me all excited and I came round to the freshly prepped set of whoops, which were pretty huge, and hooked fourth, sent it, and got sent into the ground!

I was okay but sprained my wrist a bit. It didn't really recover in time for the LCQ in which I got an average start, then crashed a bit later on, kind of came off the back thanks to a bit of whisky throttle. I genuinely loved every minute of it though and I'm so happy I sacked up and went along for the experience. I've since had a

proper SX track built by Justin Barclay so I'm ready next time.

Since then it's been pretty basic – long hours training off the MX bike, then two days a week riding. Once the KTM comes I will ease into a bit more riding. I'm so far ahead of this time last year, which is awesome – I've just got to try and keep everything steadily improving and keep enjoying it as much as I currently am.

December was like a bit of a boot camp for me and it was cool to start working with my new mechanic Paul Keates. He's a clever bloke and has a great eye for how the bike is working.

I've been riding a lot with my team-mate Ben Watson and he's been staying at mine for a week at a time. Think he's been surprised at how good all the tracks are around here. We're both enjoying it though and pushing each other on – every time we ride we make it like a race, just as I normally do with Tombsy, who's also been riding with us and going way better now on a Husky.

Christmas didn't really feel much like Christmas this year, I think as we were riding a fair bit in the lead up to it and training so much that I didn't really ever get time to take it all in and Blu has been working flat out too. The day itself was cool spent with family and had my best mate and his missus over too.

But yeah, I'm ready to start racing now and it won't be long until we are. We head to Spain next week which should be mint. Thanks for reading folks and Happy New Year!

GO HARD #45

TIME TO SHINE!

SAM SUNDERLAND ENTERS HIS FOURTH DAKAR RALLY KNOWING HE HAS EXACTLY WHAT IT TAKES TO TOP THE PODIUM - THE QUESTION IS, CAN HE PULL IT OFF?

Words by **Future7Media** Photos by **KTM Media** and **HRC**

A quick look at Sam Sunderland's Dakar stats show there's little to impress – certainly nothing that reflects the wealth of talent that the Dorset born Dubai resident possesses. His speed and physical fitness has never been in question – it was a series of injuries and mechanical issues that prevented Sam finishing any of the three Dakar Rallies he's participated in.

Following a stellar season that saw him battle for the FIM Cross-Country Rallies Championship until the very last stage – he eventually finished as runner-up to Pablo Quintanilla – Sunderland reckons he's in the prime of his career. He's ready to prove himself in the 2017 running of the iconic race.

DBR: Sam, we won't hold back here... do you think you can win the 2017 Dakar Rally?

SS: "To sit here and claim I can win the Dakar without having finished one yet is a bit arrogant of me and I wouldn't like to say that. But I know one thing and that's that I have the speed and maturity needed so I know I can do it. I worked really hard last season and I will continue working hard until the moment I board a plane to South America. I'm expecting the 2017 Dakar to be a tough one but I reckon I have

what it takes to battle for the top."

DBR: What do you consider as the biggest challenges of the upcoming event?

SS: "It's going to be really tough Dakar. There might not be such thing as an easy Dakar but for sure the 2016 event was a lot easier than the previous ones. It was quite straightforward with lots of WRC-styled high-speed tracks.

"In 2017 we'll have six stages at an altitude of over 4,000 metres. There's also a lot of navigation involved and a new system with the waypoints where we have to validate them ourselves within a 400 metre radius.

"I think the tough time is going to be Bolivia this time. To me Bolivia looks a bit like the mountain stages at the Tour de France. This is where big things can happen. I need to make sure I stay smart there and avoid big risks.

"One thing is for sure – we're definitely in for a hard time."

DBR: Let's first take a big step back, back to the very beginning. How did it all start for you, the dirt bike racing thing?

SS: "It all began when I was seven years old. My parents bought me a PW50 so I started going around >>





the fields. Soon after I started racing local motocross before going on to race the national series. My career took a tumble when I was 16. I had an accident and broke both my legs so I was forced to stay off the bike for a whole year. When you're 16 it's probably the best time to seriously consider making a career by joining a team. But I didn't give up, I got back on the bike and continued trying to be the best I could be."

DBR: When did you decide to relocate to Dubai and why?

SS: "I moved to Dubai when I was 19 years old. My auntie and uncle live there so at first I just went there for holidays. My uncle rides so I took my kit with me and started riding in local tracks. It turned out the KTM UAE manager was there so he offered me a ride for the local motocross series. I decided to stay so ended up winning the motocross championship. At the time I did some other races around the world. I did the Loretta Lynn's amateur championship in the US and also raced a couple of rounds of the Australian Motocross Championship."

DBR: How did the transition from motocross to rally racing come about?

SS: "Living in Dubai I started racing the Baja series which is similar to enduro racing over there. There were some good rally riders that were doing the series and I ended up winning the UAE National Baja Championship in 2010 and 2011. At that time I had no intention to switch to rally racing. Then I was kind of lucky that the first round of the 2011 FIM Cross-Country Rallies Championship was the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge. Until that point I'd never navigated in the desert or even ridden such a bike before. I had a blast and ended up winning two stages. One of them I won by 20 minutes in front of Marc Coma and all the top guys."

DBR: How different did rally racing seem to you in the beginning?

SS: "It was a bit overwhelming in the beginning. There's a lot you need to take in and try to understand. In Abu Dhabi the GPS was open so I ended up following the GPS quite a lot. It was an ideal scenario for my transition to rallies. After my results at Abu Dhabi I got offered a couple of deals to race

rallies and it just happened. Shortly after Abu Dhabi I raced the Australasian Safari and that was only roadbook navigation – no GPS. It was a bit of a shock at first but I figured it out pretty quick and went on to win three stages in front of Cyril [Despres] and some other guys."

DBR: How did the chance to race Dakar on a Honda come up at the first place?

SS: "The offer to do my first Dakar in 2012 originally came through Roger Harvey [HRC MXGP General Manager], who was in Dubai and saw me ride. Originally the plan was for him to find me a chance to ride for a motocross team. Shortly after Roger came back and said there was a chance to do the Dakar and if I'd be interested. To be honest I didn't really know what the Dakar was all about and didn't have that much of an idea about its impact on the global media and the industry."

DBR: What did you learn from your very first participation at the rally back in 2012?

SS: "I did my first Dakar for Henk Hellegers' team on a standard Honda CRF450X with >>



After moving to Dubai the transition from MXer to desert racer was a bit of a no brainer!







VIEW FROM THE TOP!

RED BULL KTM RALLY FACTORY RACING TEAM MANAGER JORDI VILADOMS ON THE SPEEDY SQUADRON'S YOUNGEST TALENT...

"Sam is one of the fastest rally riders in the world at the moment. Living in Dubai gives him the opportunity to be doing loads of training in the desert. That's massively helped Sam read the terrain a lot better. He's really strong in fast sections and physically one of the fittest athletes in our sport. He's a Dakar stage winner and has proved he can battle it out with the best riders in the sport. I think he has a good potential to do well in Dakar 2017 and I'm glad he'll continue working with us for another three years."



When Sam picked up a ride with the HRC team he was pretty much an unknown talent...



a big tank on it. I was more like a privateer and had to raise 50,000 euro to be able to do it. I managed to get a sponsor from Dubai and there I was at the start in Argentina. Unfortunately, I had a problem with the stator of the bike on day two and that was it really. That was my first taste of the Dakar. I did the first stage which was a 600km liaison and another 50km of special after that. It was over before it even started and I definitely didn't enjoy the 600km liaison. Just to go to the start of the Dakar and see all the show changed my perception of the race. It opened my eyes and I realised how big the race was."

DBR: Joining Honda's official team for Dakar 2013, was that the moment you realised rally racing would be your future?

SS: "I'd been pushing a lot towards the motocross side of my career so it took me a while to understand how big rally was. Motocross has always been my passion so I wanted to do my best to make a career out of it but shortly after I raced my first rally in Abu Dhabi I began to realise what it was all about."

"When I started doing well it was on Eurosport and all my friends in the UK saw it. When I got offered the chance to race Dakar for Honda's official team that was the moment I thought it was a great opportunity for me to make a living racing bikes. At that time I was still working at KTM Dubai and was just riding at the weekends. That was the first time I thought it was pretty serious... racing for HRC, taking trips to Japan and looking at clay models of the bike."

DBR: Working hard to prepare for your first Dakar as a factory rider you were forced to miss the 2013 event due to injury. What actually happened then?

SS: "Injuries are unfortunately an inevitable part of racing bikes and have affected my career a lot. Four weeks before the 2013 Dakar we were testing with HRC in America and I had a mechanical problem. There was a weight attached to my bike's handlebars that fell off and got stuck between the forks and the chassis. I was doing 130kmh and the steering locked and I couldn't turn. I lost balance and ended up breaking both my wrists."

DBR: How hard is to accept missing a race you've been working hard for?

SS: "It sucks a lot and it's happened to me twice – in 2013 and 2016. >>>

The pain is the small part. You can deal with it and you know it's going to go away. The hardest part is that you need to spend weeks or maybe months to get back to where you were. You spend every day of your life working really hard to be strong and fit so when this happens it could play havoc with your mind. It's part of our job and we should learn how to control it.

"For me missing the 2016 rally was harder to accept. I felt like I had worked a lot for that race. I won the 2015 Morocco Rally against all the top guys and then three days later I broke my femur at the Merzouga Rally. It was an emotional rollercoaster. I felt miserable but I moved on. Everyone sees us smiling on the podium but there's a lot of work behind that. If you want to be a top 15 guy you can be more reserved for sure. But if you want to fight for the top five or for the win, you play a bit more the percentages."

DBR: How have all these experiences shaped Sam Sunderland as the racer he currently is?

SS: "In the end all these moments make you who you are and I've grown a lot as a racer during these last 12 months. From staying away from the bike for four months to coming back and fighting for the world championship all year is the best proof that I've done a really good job. In 2016 I got second in Abu Dhabi, won in Qatar and then got second in Morocco and runner-up in the championship."

DBR: Overall, what do you consider as your strongest points as a racer?

SS: "First it's fighting spirit and desire to succeed. When I broke my femur and collarbone at the Merzouga Rally the first thought that came on my mind was how long it would take me to get back. I was sat there alone in the Moroccan desert counting the days to the next Dakar. I worked really hard to make the Dakar but in the end I was two or three weeks out. Also, as a rally racer I always felt I had the speed so my main focus was to improve on my navigation. Riding in Dubai at the open desert helped me learn how to read the terrain at speed. When you come from England you don't really get the chance to ride in wide open areas and go fast."

DBR: With the Dakar taking place once a year, it's hard to realise the level of commitment needed to prepare for these two weeks of racing every January...

SS: "It's 100 per cent commitment throughout the year but it's the same as if we were racing in MXGP or MotoGP. You need to be professional and you need to put the long hours in every day. The level of competition in rally racing has gone up so much over the last few years. It's constantly going forward and if you want to fight for the top positions you have to follow."

DBR: What's different for Sam Sunderland going into the 2017 Dakar Rally?

SS: "I've matured a lot over the years and I think I'm in the best position to go get what's there for me. To go have femur surgery in some dodgy town in the middle of the Saharan desert is not a nice experience."



Sam feels ready to win the 2017 Dakar with KTM's help





It's not something that you want to repeat and it plays on your mind. I have to put that aside when racing and try to avoid making the same mistakes.

"Probably the biggest difference is that I've learned to recognise when it's not my time to push. If I'm in dust or if I make some navigational mistake you have to accept things as they come. Before I would always fight to get myself out of a difficult situation as soon as possible. I would try to pass as many riders as possible pushing as hard as I could. And this is when mistakes come. Rally is not about the now, it's always about another day. On a normal day when everything is good you fight for every second and every kilometre but when things don't work out so well then you need to be smart and accept things as they come."

DBR: Does being part of the team that's dominated Dakar for the past 15 years put any extra pressure on your shoulders?

SS: "I wouldn't say there's extra pressure – just motivation to keep doing our job as best as we can. The strongest part about Red Bull KTM Rally Factory Racing Team is that everybody within the team knows their job well. Obviously, we've got a lot of talent in the team. Matthias is a former rally world champion and Toby is just an animal. The atmosphere is great and together we all battle for the win on equal terms. Out of all of us some will finish and hopefully one will win."

DBR: Which riders do you see as favourites for the win at the upcoming South American rally?

SS: "The race had changed since the times when Cyril Despres and Marc Coma were the favourites. Now there are at least 10 guys who can battle for the win at every stage. Obviously, you can't count out the guy who won it last year – Toby Price. He's done really well during the 2016 season and he has what it takes to take another win."

"But so many things can happen during

these two weeks so it's really hard to make predictions. I think at least 10 guys could win it in 2017. Along with myself there's also Walkner, Quintanilla, Price, Svitko, Barreda, Goncalves and a few fast Yamaha dudes. It's no joke, there's plenty of talent in the Dakar so I think it's whoever makes the least mistakes."

DBR: What would you say are the keys to Dakar success?

SS: "I think it's like a race of attrition. Take Antoine Meo for example, who lost 35 minutes on stage one when he flooded his bike and went on to battle for the overall podium until the moment he crashed on the penultimate day. It's really hard to say exactly what's needed to succeed in the Dakar. It's not that you'd cruise along for two weeks and expect yourself to land on the podium. You have to race, you have to be fast, you have to not make mistakes but at the end of the day you need to make sure you arrive at the end of each stage."



BEST AND WORST...

BEST DAKAR MEMORY: WINNING A STAGE AT DAKAR 2014...

"It's such a cool feeling to finish up a day at the Dakar as the stage winner. For me this happened in 2014. It was a long stage with high-speed sections where we hit 160km/h. There were also technical parts that were all about first and second gear and we had dunes so there was a bit of everything that day. Last time a British rider had won a stage was back in 1998 so it was a really proud moment."

WORST DAKAR MEMORY: GOING THE WRONG SIDE OF A MOUNTAIN IN 2013...

"During the 2013 Dakar I got lost and ended up going the wrong side of a mountain. I spent two hours completely lost, dehydrated and wondering if I was ever going to get out of there. It was five or six of us going left down a mountain and there was no way to get back up. We had to go through a big ravine and it was just chaos."



SAFETY

WITH NEW SAFETY LEGISLATION ON ITS WAY WE TALK TO INDUSTRY BIG HITTERS 6D AND LEATT ABOUT THE VERY LATEST IN HELMET TECHNOLOGY...

Words by **Adam Wheeler** Photos by **Ray Archer**

Since the first full-face models appeared on shop shelves around 50 years ago helmets have gone through some pretty hefty advances. Everything from external shell construction to the inner liner has progressed in terms of technology, design and manufacturing methods.

While a company like Arai – still family owned and fabricating their wares in Japan – may take pride in old-school demonstrations of construction strength there has also been relatively little evolution in the rudimentary role of the helmet as an impact guard.

Certification standards in Europe, the USA and other places including Japan mean that a decently-priced product will normally offer resistance and performance far above the levels required to pass those anvil tests and get that shiny sticker. But it wasn't until American company 6D launched almost four years ago that the wider performance of what a helmet could offer came into focus.

Their Omnidirectional Suspension addressed rotational acceleration and low, mid and high velocity impacts and the point at where concussion begins and not just at the speed at which any collision would be fatal. It is basically an absorption system (thanks to a series of dampeners between the liners) that addresses acceleration – when your head and brain moves out of sync with the rest of the neck or body.

The ATR-1 off-road lid won awards and drew acclaim even if critics pointed at the high price and a perceived larger shell. 6D had made their presence felt in the industry – and beyond – and their work with the NFL Head Health Challenge for a sport that has come under intense

scrutiny in America for the high number of and repercussions of concussion and head trauma has given their discoveries even more credence.

Leatt picked up the gauntlet in 2015 with the unveiling of their GPX 6.5 and Bell also aimed for the same safety provision with their Flex system in the off-road Moto-9. Suddenly the big names looked as though they were being left behind.

Over the past year the FIM has been working behind the scenes and with various manufacturers to address extra protective potential for helmets. It means that the lids with an official stamp to enter a Grand Prix gate in 2018 will have to do more than they currently offer.

Any motorcyclist looking to buy a new helmet knows there is an ocean of choice. The general rule of thumb is that the more expensive a helmet is the better it is with the old '50p helmet for a 50p head' phrase commonly used. So as well as normal considerations such as budget, reputation, colour and design, consumers can now think about extra safety benefits and that's largely thanks to the forerunners against the deadly and consequential effects of rotational acceleration.

6D's modest office space in Brea – a short distance east of Anaheim, California – belies the weight of ambition behind their products. The company number less than 15 people but the 'rock' in this David's sling is sharp and has already rattled the Goliath that is the vast helmet industry and the notion that a lid will protect you from a bang and that's it.

The first office we encounter belongs to 6D co-founder and creator of ODS, the amiable Bob Weber who has a vice-like handshake and

a very open and lucid manner of conversation.

"I had a lot of awareness of riders who had been concussed or worse in motocross – myself included – and the helmets were not keeping up with the motorcycles and the sport," he explains. "I love this sport man, I have been in it since I was a kid and I have been racing for over 35 years. I wanted to be here for my kids and their kids. If it gets to the point where humans cannot survive the accidents then the sport will just go away."

"Looking back it was a pretty big endeavour to come in and fight the giants with a different helmet and technology but I'm proud of what we have done. We have influenced the market and we've helped a lot of people and even if our helmet is not complete for every kind of accident – and I doubt there will ever be one – we have to keep trying, keep improving and making them better."

Further down the hall is partner Robert Reisinger – who brought the acute scientific and mechanical nuance to Weaver's vision. Putting the pair together to talk motivations behind rippling the helmet pool, finding a non-existent testing base, fending off the copycats and getting their message out there leads to a lengthy chat...

DBR: Certification obviously means so much for helmets...so how was it to create something and address the issue of rotational acceleration when there wasn't any firm frame of reference?

RR: "There are two basic defining tests [for helmets] and they don't look at anything else except to pass and that is the shortfall of the whole homologation process. We're talking about brain protection...not just skulls. >>

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Models	Years	Part No.
CRF 250 R	2004 - 09	56-K100.78.CGA
CRF 250 R	2010 - 15	56-K134.768.CGA
CRE 450 X IE	2007 - 08	56-K115.096.CGA
CRE F 450 R	2005 - 07	56-K101.096.CGA
CRE Motard	2002 - 10	56-K101.096.CGA
CRF 450 R	2002 - 08	56-K101.096.CGA
CRF 450 R	2009 - 16	56-K142.096.CGA
CRF 450 X	2005 - 14	56-K115.096.CGA
CRM 450 X IE	2007 - 08	56-K115.096.CGA
CRM F 450 R	2005 - 07	56-K101.096.CGA
CRM F 450 / CREF 450	2005 - 09	56-K115.096.CGA

Kawasaki

Models	Years	Part No.
KX 250F	2004 - 08	56-K104.77.CGA
KX 250F	2009 - 10	56-K145.77.CGA
KX 250F	2011 - 14	56-K146.77.CGA
KX 250F	2015 - 16	56-K166.77.CGA
KX 450F	2006 - 08	56-K124.096.CGA
KX 450F	2009 - 15	56-K147.096.CGA

SUZUKI

Models	Years	Part No.
RM-Z 250	2004 - 06	56-K104.77.CGA
RM-Z 250	2007 - 09	56-K129.77.CGA
RM-Z 250	2010 - 15	56-K148.77.CGA
RM-Z 450	2005 - 06	56-K110.095.CGA
RM-Z 450	2007	56-K149.095.CGA
RM-Z 450	2008 - 16	56-K131.096.CGA

KTM

Models	Years	Part No.
EXC-F 250	2007 - 13	56-K128.76.STD
EXC-F 250	2014 - 15	56-K143.78.CGA
EXC-F 250 Sixdays	2009 - 13	56-K128.76.STD
SX-F 250	2006 - 12	56-K128.76.STD
SX-F 250	2013 - 15	56-K151.78.CGA
XC-F 250	2007 - 12	56-K128.76.STD
XCF-W 250	2007 - 13	56-K128.76.STD
EXC F 350	2012 - 13	56-K153.88.CGA
EXC-F Sixdays 350	2013	56-K153.88.CGA
Freeride 350	2013	56-K153.88.CGA
SX F 350	2011 - 15	56-K152.88.CGA
XC-F 350	2011 - 13	56-K152.88.CGA
XCF-W 350	2012	56-K153.88.CGA

YAMAHA

Models	Years	Part No.
WR 250F	2001 - 12	56-K103.77.CGA
WR 250R	2008 - 13	56-K144.77.CGA
WR 250R	2015 - 16	56-K170.77.CGA
WR 250X	2008 - 13	56-K144.77.CGA
YZ 250F	2001 - 13	56-K103.77.CGA
YZ 250F	2014 - 15	56-K170.77.CGA
WR 450F	2003 - 06	56-K114.95.CGA
WR 450F	2007 - 15	56-K108.95.CGA
YZ 450F	2003 - 05	56-K114.95.CGA
YZ 450F	2006 - 09	56-K108.95.CGA
YZ 450F	2010 - 13	56-K138.097.CGA
YZ 450F	2014 - 16	56-K165.097.CGA

Husqvarna

Models	Years	Part No.
FC 250	2014 - 15	56-K151.78.CGA
FE 250	2014 - 15	56-K143.78.CGA
TC 250	2003 - 05	56-K164.76.CGA
TC 250	2006 - 09	56-K167.76.CGA
TE 250	2003 - 05	56-K164.76.CGA
TE 250	2006 - 09	56-K167.76.CGA
FC 350	2014 - 15	56-K152.88.CGA

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While the inner workings of a 6D helmet might blow your mind they're actually there to protect it...



6D co-founder Robert Reisinger is the creator of the ODS system

"The standards were created around the notion of what it would take to smash and crack a human skull and were developed with cadaver and comparable tests. There are very few companies in the world [that have this knowledge] until you step into the auto industry where they look at human body tests in cars and have had the right equipment for decades to look at all kinds of motion in the body.

"You have to shift the equipment from the generic stuff and the CE and DOT outline and into more advanced fields that leads into the Hybrid III products that are very expensive, and you need knowledge to be able to process what you want to find out."

BW: "Right from the beginning there were no criteria. We went to a company called Dynamic Research and they initially did not know what we were trying to test for specifically and we said 'we want to induce a spin, what do you think?'. We distilled it down to a big pendulum machine where you could mount a head-form and swing and smash it into something. We said 'well, that's not really a motorcycle crash' and it leaves a lot of 'noise' as they call it in testing.

"So we tried a full body pendulum swing and bounced it off an inclined plane and we got into the same situation of 'is this the right kind of impact?' because we wanted to see what was really going on with the helmet and nobody swings from trapeze strings and defies gravity on a bike. So we defaulted to some things we'd seen out there from other organisations.

"MIPS' information was out there and we ended up looking at the incline plane as it seemed the cleanest in terms of testing. We turned back to Terry Smith at Dynamic and began building new fixtures. We're using a standard ECE and the 10khz data machine that will record it at the right rate – which is a critical part – and we started developing this process. Right now the FIM is actively trying to define their process that people will have to meet to wear a helmet in FIM sanctioned circuit racing."

RR: "We had been going down a road trying to define 'how do we do this? How do we implement a testing protocol that will give us data so we can compare from one helmet configuration to another?'. The next question is – a 'is this real? Is this the kind of impact we see out there and is it adequate?'."

"If you are a doctor you will want to know about it in terms of human biology. >>>

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Although the technology is way different to other helmets the build process is familiar



"Would you like fries with that?" – the 6D telesales team enjoy a joke between selling huge shipments...



If you're an engineer then you will want to know the energy transfer. If you are a testing lab then it has to be repeatable for anybody else out there whether it's a PHD or a knuckle-head they have to be also to go through the same path with a certain percentage of accuracy. Rotational testing is a bag of worms – it is not linear testing which has been done for decades and is repeatable.

"We are hearing that the ECE is closer to something as an optional standard. It will be interesting to see what they come out with and what protocol people can be measured by. Establishing that protocol is the challenge right now and so it is repeatable per helmet geometry and configuration because the shapes of helmets affect the spin impact in significant ways that are difficult to understand intuitively. You have to do it...and with expensive machinery like these Hybrid III head-forms and complicated data acquisition systems.

"You also have to be able to look at it in high-speed film to be able to see what is going on. We've done hundreds and thousands of tests with high-speed film where we have gone 'whoah! Why did the helmet hit the anvil and head off like that and didn't induce a spin?'. Other times it will induce a violent spin. It becomes a very big challenge and if you have ridges and forms they can affect the strike and sends the helmet into doing something entirely different."

DBR: Arai seem to promote the use of a smooth shell to enable the helmet to slide...

BW: "It is a good philosophy and we subscribe to the same one. In fact our shell is pretty conservative compared to some of the other ones out there but we also know that in today's environment you also need to have some kind of stylised helmet. Look at the Airoh – that thing is all radical angles – and the Shoei also. That's what the market wants – or what they think they want – because they are not thinking about the safety aspect of the helmet."

RR: "Until we get the FIMs and AMAs of the world saying 'you cannot wear a helmet like that' then they will always be driven to something they sell. If a guy is looking at it from a sense of vanity instead of safety then you are kinda stuck."

DBR: It's been three and a half years now for 6D – do you feel that you've trodden a new path? >>

Testing is a huge part of the 6D development process



Ben Townley's a firm believer in 6D head protection...



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BW: "I think there has been an impact and proof of it also. I was in Denver recently visiting some dealerships and talked about the same thing with a sales guy. I asked the question 'do you feel the customer is more educated now when they come in to purchase a helmet compared to three years ago?' And he said 'absolutely everyone is aware of the 6D, everybody wants that technology' but unfortunately his comment to me was 'you guys are expensive and the bulk of our helmets sales are well down the chain from where your helmet is priced'.

"That's difficult for us to hear because obviously we want it available to the masses but in one regard we are almost building two helmets to make one and that's the only reason why ours costs more money – it is more expensive to manufacture and produce.

"When you take a look at Bell, for instance, who had introduced their Flex technology and MIPS has been adopted into more and more motorcycle and bicycle helmets and Leatt have their own version – they kinda took our system and put a dampener between the skull and the EPS [Expanded Polystyrene] as opposed to between layers – then the market has become a lot more aware of brain injury and they are looking for solutions. MIPS is an easy one for a manufacturer because it really doesn't take up space in the helmet, it is relatively simple to apply and is not expensive to make."

DBR: What's your take on MIPS? You see it in a number of helmets now...

BW: "It works in certain parameters and does an okay job but it has no ability to manage linear acceleration or rotational acceleration

the way ours does. Through our system being completely uncoupled and suspended it has the ability to displace three dimensionally wherever the impact comes from. For MIPS technology the ideal impact angle is 45 degrees and the closer you get to 90 the less effective it is because it just binds up on itself."

RR: "In an angular sense it is a step in the right direction and in the broad spectrum between zero Gs to the limit G – whatever that is, let's call it 300 – typical helmets protect from 150 upwards according to our testing. The EPS and the shell are tuned for that window and start to suck up energy.

"If you are down at the level of 60 – which is the start of a concussion for an adult male – from that point up to 150 then you are not getting much protection other than the hard impact point of the shell and helmet which is still a hard smack into your brain. You might be protecting your skull but there is still a lot of energy heading into your brain and into the concussive range.

"That's the problem with helmets at a lower threshold and MIPS cannot do anything about that whereas the 6D technology does. I think we are actually riding on MIPS' coattails because they have been out there a long time and they couldn't get any traction because people did not see the need for it.

"We are their best friends. We kick-started the industry and the thirst for knowledge for technology to put in helmets and what they were doing made sense. When we launched we had everybody asking us for licences and we said no and they turned to MIPS as the only

alternative out there and now MIPS is on fire."

BW: "Our helmet shape was very strategic so that we could round-out the outer surface of the inner EPS against the inner surface of the outside EPS to make it as much of a ball-and-socket as possible. That's one of the constraints in the MIPS system. Our heads are long ovals and with two directions of the x-y-z co-ordinates means it is not going to go very far before it starts to bind up on cheekbones or the corners of your cranium.

"In this direction – up and down – it will move pretty easily, just like when you put your helmet on you can shuffle it up and down pretty easily. But in the other direction you have to be yielding the EPS pretty good to be getting the additional benefit out of the MIPS liner and the energy is not high enough because you have a small, compact helmet.

"There are some real strengths and benefits to the Omnidirectional Suspension technology that nobody else has. Our system is freer and has more ability to do its work. Independent testing shows that. Our helmet is way-out in front for low energy compliance and for rotational acceleration.

"Bell gets close with their system on rotation but on low energy we are pretty far ahead and this is exciting for us because we were the pioneers and the first ones to build something different in a helmet and in that shell environment and it is still the number one solution out there.

"We wouldn't have been accepted into this NFL programme if we didn't have something that was working and unique. Out of the 125 >>>





companies that applied for this programme their original plan was to choose six for more funding to continue their testing. They only had 21 out of that group to show any kind of merit at all and only picked five.

"We had to submit a test article, package a variation on the design that we'd been thinking about and file another patent. It is an evolution of our system that can be used in a multi impact environment. We are also the only helmet manufacturer that got into the programme and I think that alone speaks of the value of our system and what it does. I don't know if the market really understands – maybe we haven't communicated that well – but our ODS technology is a system that is designed to reduce the transfer of energy from an impact site at the shell to the interior level of where you head is at."

DBR: How did 6D come along? Why did companies with five decades of experience not find this first?

BW: "I think the standards just ask you to reach a certain level of energy. Everyone always talks about exceeding those standards, and well, you need to be part of the programme but maybe exceeding it by such a huge margin is not such a great thing."

"Going back to the beginning I was a pretty savvy mechanic and had a good understanding of things but I knew I needed somebody that could help me do it properly and that's where Robert came in. He was my first and only phone call. He saw enough merit in what we were doing to shut down his other business and join me in this venture."

"We had to go out and find the capital to start the company. We didn't have any staff and now we have 11 people here in our offices today and three more contracted. I look back at what has happened in three and a half years and its like 'holy cow'."

"When we were in the development phase not a day went by when I woke up and looked at the news and waited for someone to have discovered a breakthrough in motorcycle helmets that would address rotational acceleration – I couldn't have been the only guy

out there aware of the problem! Anyway I was quite excited when we got to launch day and nobody else had said or done anything..."

On the eve of the 2016 Monster Energy Grand Prix of USA at Glen Helen South African safety specialists and trailblazers in their own regard when it comes to neck brace technology, Leatt, are presented their 2017 collection, which included the second generation of the GPX 6.5 helmet.

Todd Repsher, General Manager of the Americas, buzzes his way through a description of a product that has also caused a stir through a condensed shell dimension that allegedly reduces forces transferred to the neck. Leatt's wealth of knowledge and research gathered from their inroads into neck protection cannot be understated and when Repsher advocates that the GPX (that hits a similar price as the ATR-1) brings "up to 30 per cent reduction in concussive level forces and 40 per cent reduction in brain rotational forces," then the claims come with a degree of validation.

"The GPX involves a 360 turbine system and similar principals to 6D. MIPS and the Bell Moto-9 Flex is a brilliant concept too," Repsher comments when we ask about the tendency for some firms to look around and then look internally. "I think we have all been chasing this thing. We have been working on this for several years. 6D is a really good concept. We are inviting a new focus area and it's good for everyone."

"In the Lab in Capetown the focus was on neck braces but we were destroying a lot of helmets! They started learning other things from all the data and tests they were logging," he continues. "Helmets are a serious subject. It isn't an area where you just 'dabble'. It takes a whole brand commitment and tremendous resources. We brought in a whole different team of product engineers. It was a committed direction from the brand."

Leatt also echo concerns over shell form and effects. Any hint of gimmickry in what is perhaps the most voluminous segment of the motorcycle apparel market is instantly dismissed. "We are not fans of the camera mount and why we have such a focus on the

breakaway visor. We tested a lot and do not want anything that can add to rotation," says Repsher. "We are a protective company and as we grow we want to enhance the rider's experience. The helmet is an emphatic part of a rider's kit. If we can better or enhance the helmet market and the technology on offer then that's really the ethos of our company. I don't think there is a fear of the market saturation because we don't just step-in with something that has our logo."

In the same way that when Leatt launched the GPX neck brace 10 years ago – and waded into a murky pool of litigation with other companies eager to replicate and exploit the new awareness over neck protection – can 6D look at the next originations of helmets with some trepidation or frustration?

"At the end of the day it's a good thing because the market needs it and every helmet needs better protection than what they've historically had...at least until three years ago and for two of those years we were the only game in town with something significant to offer," says Weber. "I do think it is good that other manufacturers have gone back to the drawing board to improve their systems. In our evaluation some of those systems do certain things better than a traditional helmet design and some of them don't actually do much. That's where the consumer really needs to think."

"We have been criticised a little bit for the overall volume or size of our helmet but [in a crash] then you want to stop over the longest distance possible when you have an impact. You want that distance and time to be maximised. If you have a very compact shell like a lot of the European helmets you've given up that ability. In order to manage the energy the density of the EPS goes way-up and when that happens they are less effective down where they need to be to address concussive loads and protect the brain."

The fact that newcomers like 6D and Leatt are rallying against far bigger and much more established companies is one indication that technology to combat brain injury has grounds and is possible. That Bell would



invest considerably to come up with their Flex system (a trimatrix construction – three layers essentially) means the tide is starting to turn.

Now that the FIM is throwing the spotlight on the biggest promotion window for apparel brands – internationally sanctioned racing – an element of ‘hurry up’ has been put into the mix for the rest of the market to follow or co-innovate.

“I liken it to the rise of GoPro and how they walked under the traditional camera manufacturers,” Repsher offers when asked how the likes of 6D and Leatt were able to usurp the competition. “The big helmet companies do seem slow to the game but I wouldn’t dare that they have the resources and abilities [to match their competition]. It is like Honda – they wait and when they come out with something then it’s good.”

“Many helmet manufacturers already have this kind of R&D in mind, they also want more modern standards,” says Manfredi, almost to dispel the idea that the FIM are doing their own form of pushing. “I have been speaking every day with the manufacturers and we are ready to collaborate to officially open the applications toward helmet homologation without imposing too tight timelines.”

“It is very exciting because of that direct contact with the companies and there is a lot of willingness there to make a big effort behind what we’re doing,” she adds. “It is also a challenge from my side because there are many different manufacturers; some use a more modern approach, some less so, some are small, some are very big. They all have different cultures, practices and even philosophies. I’ve had some intense and long meetings and have been very keen and open to let everyone express their needs.

“Then you have some brands that are already moving ahead. Like 6D, just to use an example. There actually aren’t even any standards or method that can fully certify what they are doing. The helmet industry is working to 10 year old standards, at least in the case of the European road homologation.”

The rush to bolster a helmet’s spec list and capabilities is also something that the guys at 6D are a little wary of. “Consumers can get

confused by what is essentially a watered down concept,” says Reisinger. “It looks and smells good but ultimately it won’t do the job. I’m afraid that consumers will buy one of these helmets, go out and get hurt and then think ‘well, that didn’t do any good why am I buying these more expensive products? It is all bullsh*t and smoke and mirrors’.

“We’ve had our helmets out there long enough that we’ve had tons go through crashes and come back to us with reports – because we cannot test with humans – and we’ve had feedback from people with reported cases of concussions saying their threshold had increased. It is anecdotal and it is not scientific and it is difficult for any kind of organisation or company to gather that kind of information but we have enough feedback to know that the system is helping the biology of people to tolerate and sustain less injury for given impacts.

“We are seeing products that are just a joke in the lab,” he adds. “They are out there now and people are buying them based on ‘technology’. Something has the new ‘turbo wheel’ or the new ‘XYZ’. If you look in a helmet and it has a MIPS then that’s what it has. It has an EPS and some other soft stuff then it is probably not going to do much for you. If it has something that has been thought-out more then it should be a step in the right direction but that direction is very vague issue that has not been defined.

“Most considerations – DOT, Snell, ECE – and the velocities and numbers they are testing at mean you are sustaining brain damage. The brain is mush. It is only a matter of how much damage you get based on the helmet, time and velocity that you hit.”

Quizz 6D on future developments and they coyly talk about their bicycle helmet that features a modular system of ODS and is manufactured by a different vendor in China. There is also talk of reducing production expenditure to further benefit the consumer.

“We need to simplify and reduce the costs of the technology in the motocross and street helmet, which is pretty much identical,” reveals Weber. “The tooling to do those two helmets is very, very expensive and the slow-down on the

assembly line and the number of parts involved all adds-up. The in-moulded modular system is a little different in design but with some nice benefits. I think you will see some evolution of that coming across to motocross side.”

6D were keen to establish the brand in specialised fields and will not licence their wares in the same way that MIPS has tended to crop up with different brands like Fly and Fox. It means turning away from sure-fire money-making opportunities but then also means they can fully extend the possibilities of their ideas within their own remit.

The work with the NFL is a potentially massive project and association and both Weber and Reisinger are visually excited about how further funded research could take helmet safety to newer dimensions. “Everything we are learning for this Head Health challenge is paying dividends for the motorcycling and cycling side,” stresses Weber.

“Overall we are aiming for the broadest range of protection we can establish,” adds Reisinger. “It is not just ‘pass’ and lets sell it. It is about how much we can lower the threshold...two metres per second, three metres per second, four metres per second – nobody else considers this or how we can look to areas where concussion is induced. There is a ton of protection that is required and needed. The medical profession is screaming about protection for below the threshold of the critical death-blow. It is something we still need to be trying to improve.”

The proactivity by the FIM and their increased safety stance of recent years has been the catalyst for a wider view on helmet safeguarding that was already piqued by the work of people like 6D, Leatt and Bell.

In the space of a season it will be an even more prevalent subject when watching at tracks or through television screens. Romain Febvre and Pauls Jonass were just two factory riders that had their 2016 seasons ruined by accidents that involved concussion. Head injuries will undoubtedly be a factor in motorsport – gravity is pretty much unbeatable – but encouragingly there are people dedicated with a clear vision to ultimately end up keeping your vision clear.



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Words by **Max Hind** Photos by **Paul Buckley** and **Max Hind**

The scene was set at Steel City Raceway. It was the last round of the 1995 AMA Nationals and, after missing part of the season with a knee injury, Factory Honda's Steve Lamson entered the final race weekend with a three-point lead in the 125cc class over Pro Circuit Kawasaki's Ryan Hughes.

Ryno, with his reputation as a bruiser on the line, was ready for war and after a moto-long battle in the first race he came out victorious to tie things up at the top with just one race to run.

Lamson took the moto two holeshot, running away with the race lead. Resisting constant pressure from Ryno, he was able to

keep his cool to take the win and the title.

Just two corners from the finish flag Hughes snapped his chain. With his championship hopes crushed he mustered the strength to push his KX125 through the final two turns and up a steep hill to reach the finish, salvaging third in the race and second in the series.

Despite losing out that day this one moment embodies the drive and determination that continue to define Ryan Hughes' life. It's a hunger for success that's seen him overcome countless injuries, return from two retirements and even recover from a broken back and paralysis.

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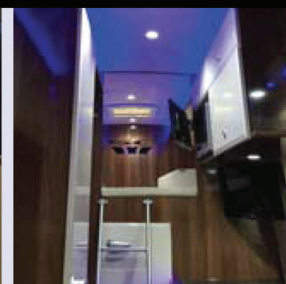
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Ryan has plenty of advice to give the next generation of young racers

EARLY DAYS THE ORIGINS OF HIS OBSESSION...

"I got my first bike – a JR50 Suzuki – at four or five years old. We used to go to the desert and my dad did a few races here and there but I was really into soccer and other sports like that. My brother raced in 1977, '78 and '79 but I still wasn't bothered just because I was playing soccer and had just started playing [American] football.

"When I was playing soccer, even though I was young, I had it in my mind that I was going to be a professional. Then I found football – a sport where I could hit people and not get in trouble for it. I did that for four years and got really good at it. Again, I wanted to be a professional. I always just had that mindset, whenever I liked something or got good at something or started to follow something I always felt that I could be the best at it.

"During that time my brother had to quit racing as my dad had to work a lot but in 1984 he started racing again. I used to tag along and I was a pretty decent rider for just play-riding so my brother and my dad wanted me to race but I was always just too scared.

"Finally, they got me to a real track on a practice day before the race. I was scared [but] eventually they got me out there and I was riding around the course and I fell over. Some guy on a big bike came over and helped me up. I was like 'oh wow, these guys are nice' and

after that it suddenly just clicked for me. It was 1984 and I was riding a 1982 Suzuki, I won my first six races on that bike in the 9-11 Beginner class.

"I turned pro in 1988 and I was still 15 years old. I continued to race the amateur nationals for two more years – my last year of amateurs was 1990 and I won pretty much everything that year."

GOING PLACES TURNING PRO...

"My first AMA National was also in 1990. I came fifth in my first moto and I tied for fifth overall on the day at Hangtown. That's when everything started to skyrocket. I got my first ride with Kawasaki – I was the hotshot coming out of the amateurs.

"In 1991 I was riding on the East Coast. I almost won my first race, I got ninth in my first 250 supercross in San Diego. Then we went to the Tokyo Dome and I broke my wrist. That's when things started to go a bit awry. My wrist was weak and I started to put my body in weird positions and that put me off-balance. Once you're off-balance you're creating more problems for yourself, more mistakes and more crashes.

"So 1991 was pretty much a write-off with the broken wrist, '92 was a good year on team Kawasaki, '93 was another bad year with a broken leg but I came back and had some good results towards the end of the season."

Ryan airs out his Splitfire Kawasaki back in 1995



GLORY DAYS AT THE HEIGHT OF HIS POWERS...

"It was bittersweet for me in 1994. It was a really good year and the worst year in one. Coming into the season I found out that my father had terminal cancer. I had a big crash in practice and I believe that was because my mind was just somewhere else – that's where this big facial scar came from.

"That crash set me back a little but I was still the favourite heading into the first race. I was supposed to be the champion that year but I didn't even qualify for my first race. That really got to me, there was so much stuff on my mind. At that time my dad was close to his last breath and I didn't qualify for the race that I was supposed to win.

"During that next week I was almost ready to quit. My dad had been with me every step of the way, every single race. It just seemed like everything was going wrong but I made up my



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mind to just keep riding, to keep going.

"I rode by myself that entire week, I didn't want to ride with anybody. The next race was in San Diego – my hometown – and I won it. It was a week after my dad died so it meant a lot to me. The rest of that year it seemed as if I could do no wrong – I had a good supercross season, a good season outdoors and my career seemed to be back on that upward trajectory.

"And 1995 was another good year. I finished second in supercross, second in the outdoors, second in the Motocross des Nations and second in the world supercross. I was second a lot! But it was a good year. For '96 I was on Team Kawasaki and I stayed there for three years."

EURO FIGHTER RYNO'S GP CHALLENGE...

"In 1999 I went to race Hondas in Europe. In '98 I had a bad year with Kawasaki so we parted ways but before that I went to Greece with Kawasaki to be a fill-in and get between Everts and Tortelli [to help Kawasaki's Seb Tortelli defeat Honda's Stefan Everts].

"Right before the race someone checked the rules and said 'oh look, Ryan wasn't signed up a month before the race...' so I couldn't ride the GP that weekend. But while I was there I talked with Yamaha and with Honda – I wasn't initially planning on it but I flew to Italy and

tested both bikes. I really enjoyed the Honda and I really liked the team so I signed up and rode in Europe in '99 and 2000.

"Those two years were probably my best years of racing, not just going by results but the entire package – being in different countries, getting to meet different people. I really enjoyed the entire experience. Racing wise 2000 wasn't the best as I started the season with a broken wrist but we finished by winning the des Nations."

I QUIT #1 HIS FIRST RETIREMENT...

"When I came back Factory Honda HRC were just about to come out with their 450 so I started developing the 450 with them. I don't think that bike was quite ready to be honest. It was a very ill-handling bike and I had a lot of crashes on it. The last one I had was a big one – I compounded my thumb, broke my scapula, collarbone and three ribs, busted my lungs and had another concussion. After that I just quit. I couldn't handle it anymore.

"So in 2001 I quit racing for a year. I was going to get an insurance policy for the injuries that I had and then 9/11 happened. Lloyds of London just got killed so they went through my claim with a fine-tooth comb and found out that I didn't mention one concussion that I'd had and said that if I had mentioned that they wouldn't have continued with my policy.

It didn't seem like it at the time but that was really a blessing in disguise.

"Around that time I had just started working with Billy Laninovich who was riding for KTM. They knew about my experience on 125s so they asked if I wanted to come along and do some testing and found out that I was three, four, five seconds a lap faster than Grant Langston and Billy. So we carried on testing and they asked me if I wanted to race the Nationals.

"So in 2003 I came back and I almost won the title that year. The following season wasn't the best as the bike wasn't great compared to all the new 250Fs. In 2005 I did my own team and by that point I was a little burnt out. I still liked being a professional racer but I just wanted to do something else so I went to the WORCS series in 2006 and 2007. I almost had the championship won in 2006 – I had a 70-point lead with three races to go but I crashed and broke my humerus so I lost another championship again there."

I QUIT #2 HIS SECOND RETIREMENT...

"In 2007 I was just done, I was over it again. I didn't want to be that guy anymore, I didn't want to be a racer. I had just started training other riders in between my WORCS races as we had such big gaps so I started working with



Ryno back in 1991 rocking
JT's iconic Dalmatian kit





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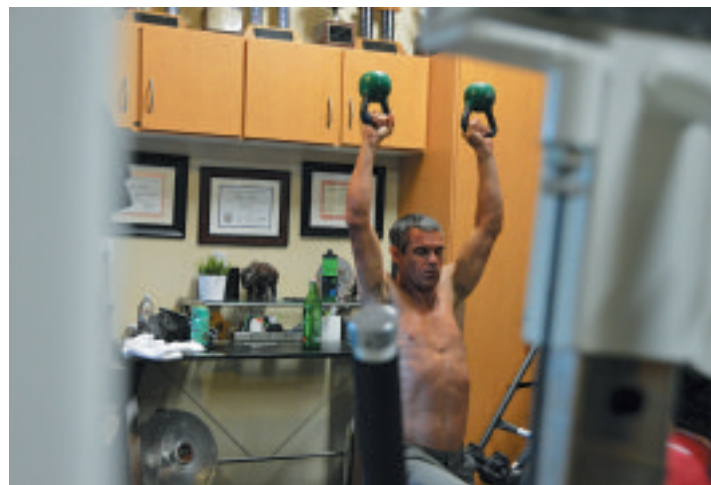
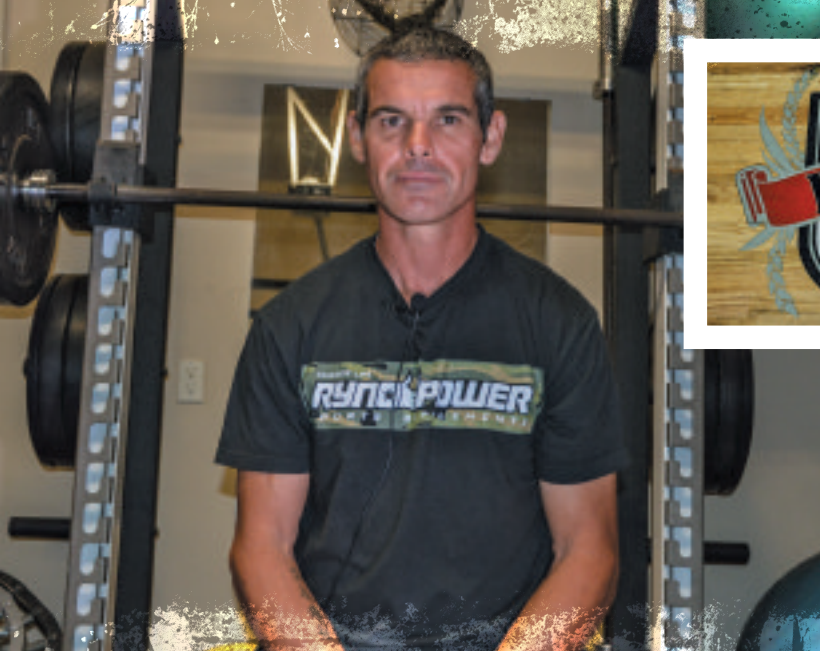
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Josh Grant and Brett Metcalfe – that was the origins of the training and coaching side of things.

"I had always had a reputation of being a solid trainer and a fit guy. I was really into nutrition and into bettering myself and finding new ways to do that so I made a big splash in the sport, training people a different way. Nowadays everyone seems to be training this way but back then I was one of the first to bring this new style with gym training into the sport and it benefited a lot of riders."

"After I retired I still did a bunch of little races here and there – I went to Australia, I did the Vets MXdN in England, I did Mammoth, a lot of stuff in South America – and then, in 2013, I broke my back. That was the true end of my racing career. I haven't raced a motorcycle since 2013, now I race mountain bikes for fun and to fill that void."

THE CRASH END OF THE LINE...

"Throughout my career I was the guy that had a bunch of crashes. My career was littered with injuries – I think the total count is something like 25 broken bones, about 20 surgeries, I don't have an ACL in my knee. I've got two plates, three rods and 24 screws in my body. I've had 18 concussions. But the last crash was the biggest one."

"I can remember it like it was yesterday."

I was at Pala teaching my guys how to go through whoops [and] I got a little sideways – it was really nothing but time seemed to just stop. In reality when you're in fourth gear on a 450 things are happening very fast but I felt I actually had the time to make a conscious decision to either chop it or gas it so me being me I decided to gas it and, right when I made that decision, bang! Larry Brooks was standing right there and he said that it was the ugliest crash he had ever seen. I went head first into a jump.

"I was paralysed from the neck down. I was rolling down watching my arms do nothing. When I came to a stop at the bottom of the jump I couldn't move my arms. Everybody that races motocross knows that's the biggest fear at the back of your mind."

THE RECOVERY A CHANGED MAN...

"I just lay there for a while and finally got my feeling back. It was kind of just a big stinger from the impact and the compression. I'd broken T2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 and T4 was gone, just disintegrated."

"I was in hospital all drugged up and the nurse came and asked how I was feeling. I said I was okay but I couldn't feel my feet. Then

this lack of feeling slowly started spreading up to my chest. A haematoma grew on my spinal column and I went paralysed right in front of my doctors."

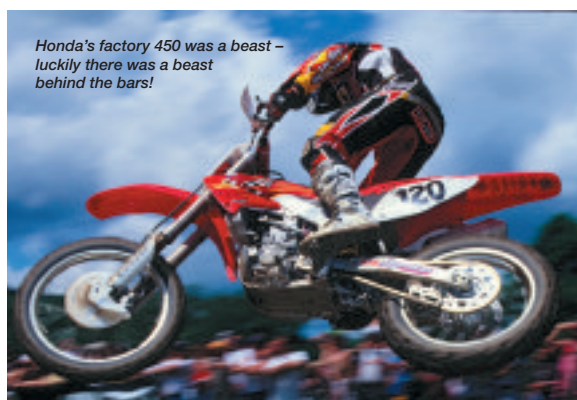
"They removed the haematoma. Apparently, while I was under sedation my feet were moving like crazy, just as fast as they could. So after that the nurses called me Happy Feet! When they woke me up they asked me how I felt – I could feel the old chap down there so I instantly shouted 'I'm good!'"

"Everything went right in my favour after the crash. I have a few problems – my right tricep doesn't work too well, neither does one of my pecs and some muscles in my back. That's because I'm fused from 2-7 and I have two rods and 11 screws in there but other than that I feel pretty good."

"This crash and this incident were probably the best things that ever happened to me. The person that I was before that crash I don't really care for much anymore. He was the racer, angry because he was done with his career – he couldn't be who he used to be but he was still stuck in that mindset. This crash slapped me in the face, it woke me up and



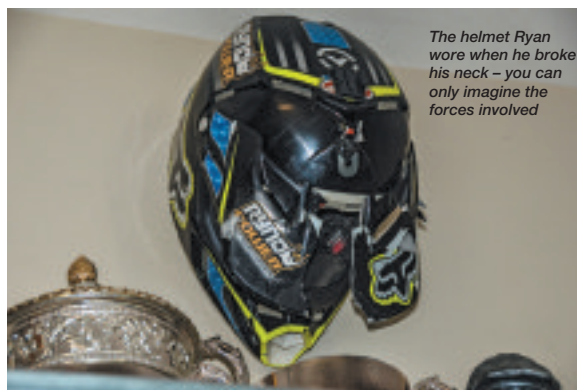
Ryan's training methods can be a little bit 'out there' but are obviously highly effective



Honda's factory 450 was a beast – luckily there was a beast behind the bars!



Some helmets from happier times including those MXoN victories



The helmet Ryan wore when he broke his neck – you can only imagine the forces involved





Ryan came very close to clinching the 125cc National title in 2003



Ryno dodging rocks at the 1998 Unadilla National



made me realise who I really was. I'd definitely say that this crash was a blessing – maybe not physically but for my personal growth it's the best thing that's ever happened to me."

ADJUSTING LIFE AFTER RACING...

"In the beginning it was tough, you're still used to being that star, to being that great racer. Now I have a lot more patience and a lot more understanding. I think sometimes something needs to happen in your life for you to be able to see the other side of things or else you just have the blinders on for good.

"Whenever things weren't going right in my life I could always fall back on riding. It was like my crutch. And now that I can't do that I have to rely on other things. Teaching is now my crutch. I love to teach, I love to share. This has become my goal, to help motocross become a safer sport. The only way to do that is through the rider – not through the bike, not through safety equipment, not through the tracks, it's through making the rider a better rider.

"I'm working with a bunch of amateurs and a bunch of little kids. Right now I have some young kids that I think you might know or will know – Talon Hawkins, Cole Martinez, Haideen Deegan – and I also teach a bunch of high school mountain bikers.

"I really enjoy teaching the little kids because the improvements we see are insane. These

kids are like a piece of clay, I can mould them perfectly into what they need to be like. You can teach them to be focused, you can teach them to be dedicated, you can train their bodies correctly, you can keep them away from injuries, you can teach them to ride the motorcycle properly with the correct technique. You then see the progression happen so quickly."

THE FUTURE PILLS N' THRILLS...

"Ryno Power [supplements range] started quite some time ago. My good friend Danny Way had a friend who had been making some supplements for himself because he was doing triathlons. Danny introduced us and I started using the products and they were great.

"One day I asked him if he was ever going to do anything properly with this stuff, he said no so I asked if he wanted to private label it and he gave me the ingredients and the formulations.

"We [Ryan and his business partner Ryan McCarthy] started the company back in 2011 with 10 grand. Since then we've never had to borrow a dollar from the banks, we haven't got an investor, we've just done it all on our own. Now we are in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South America, Russia, Europe, Japan, Dubai – we are everywhere. I'm pretty proud and impressed with how fast we've grown and how

far we've gone.

"I also have the Ryno Equipment that you can purchase yourself [and] as well as that this West Coast supercross team has just landed in my lap. I've always had the idea of being a team manager at some point and I always thought I'd be pretty good at it so when this opportunity came along I thought why the hell not! It's only West Coast and it's only one year. Who knows where it's going to go after that but I'm just going to have fun with it.

"I brought on my old mechanic Hoody who was with me in 2003 at KTM. We've also brought on Mike Brown's mechanic from back in the day so between the three of us we have over 70 years of experience.

"We're riding Yamahas and IB Cop is a corporation out of Ecuador that is sponsoring us and we also have a big help from Rock River Yamaha. So it's going to be fun. Who knows what's going to come out of it but I'm definitely going to learn and grow as a person and hopefully do some more of this in the future." |





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076: DBR TESTED
DAN GROVE POPS HIS ENDURO CHERRY...





FED UP OF THE COLD AND WET THIS WINTER? WELL, THE GOOD FOLKS AT WHEELDON FARM HAVE GOT YOU COVERED WITH THEIR FANTASTIC INDOOR RIDING EXPERIENCE...

Words and photos by **Max Hind**

As the UK's only indoor motocross facility it goes without saying that Wheeldon Off-Road Centre boasts an all-weather track that can be ridden year round no matter what Mother Nature conjures up.

For the most part of the year Wheeldon Farm is occupied by families and tourists on vacation. However from the start of November through until March the facility is open to motocross riders and racers to train, ride and stay over in the cottages if they need to.

Nestled way down the South Hams, Wheeldon is located in a fairly remote yet stunningly beautiful part of our country. A little difficult to find without the aid of a Sat Nav, the drive there is well worth it once you're finally able to get riding in the warm and dry.

The track is approximately 400 metres long which is a decent size for an indoor circuit. Lap times can range from the low 30 second range for a top pro rider to approximately 50 seconds for your Average Joe. Those are standard lap times in the arenacross world.

The track is constructed from clay-based hardpack dirt – you won't find any soft, sandy berms here but what you will find is the perfect soil to mould a varied array of AX obstacles. From whoops, to step-on step-offs, Wheeldon features obstacles to challenge riders of all abilities.

But what is great is that the track has been designed in way so both beginner and pro alike can easily make their way around with no problems. There are no overly scary jumps or rhythms – even the whoop section is split into a mellow side and a gnarly side. But if you are a faster rider and you do wish to push yourself then you can find inventive lines and rhythms that may be a little butt-clenching.

Obviously the most appealing thing about Wheeldon is the all-weather aspect. We all know how freaking miserable it can be trying to ride in the British winter. It's cold, it's wet and the tracks are horrid. But not at Wheeldon – wind, rain or shine, you'll always be able to spin laps at Wheeldon and keep both warm and dry while doing so!

However the nature of indoor riding does have its disadvantages. Just the limited space alone means that only five bikes at a time can ride around the track – with the exception of the Autos and 65s which can have six. By doing this Wheeldon keep things uncongested, allowing the riders to get into a rhythm and really start having some fun.

To combat such small groups of riders allowed on the track at a single time riding sessions at Wheeldon are only 11 minutes long. That doesn't sound all that much but trust me 11 minutes of indoor arenacross riding is more than enough time to get your heart rate up and arms pumped. I mean 11 minutes is about twice as long as most arenacross races.

By doing this Wheeldon are able to squeeze in more groups. Often the sessions are split into Autos and 65s, Small Wheels, Big Wheels, Rookies and finally Adults. It's worth noting that due to the tight nature of the track anything over a 250F is not permitted – so no Open Class machines.

The way Wheeldon operates is like this – on weekends the days are split into two halves, mornings and afternoons. Both morning and afternoon sessions are three hours long and feature different groups of riders. These groups get four 11 minute sessions within their time slot. Weekdays are slightly different and the track is open from 6PM – 9PM for local riders to come along and practice.

Due to the limited spaces available the owners

recommend that you always pre-book your visit to the farm either by calling or doing it online at www.wheeldontwo.co.uk. You are able to either book online for public sessions into your appropriate group or you can do a group booking and have the whole facility available to yourself and your riding buddies.

In terms of additional facilities and services Wheeldon has you covered. Fully functional toilets and showers are available, you can have a great catering service (we can vouch for this) as long as you've pre-booked it and beginners' bikes are available for hire as well as kit.

The cherry on top of the cake are the holiday cottages. If you are looking to make the most of your long trip down to Devon than you may as well stay for a few days and get in as much riding as possible! And what better way to spend your time at Wheeldon than in a fully furnished homely holiday cottage. Now that's how you go on a riding weekend in style...

Wheeldon is a completely unique experience that you just have to check out for yourself. The best part of it all... you don't even have to wash your bike once you're finished! You most definitely will not have that luxury if you go out riding anywhere else in the country right now...

CONCLUSION

Difficulty – a pretty easy layout but there are a few cheeky lines to be attempted.

Fun factor – you feel like a SX megastar just riding indoors!

Facilities – where else can offer you a kick ass cottage to stay the night?

Overall DBR score – The Great Indoors.



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ESSENTIAL INFO!

WHEELDON OFF ROAD CENTRE

Location: TQ9 7JY, Devon

Length: 400 metres

Prices: £35

Contact: 01548 821784

Surface: Clay based hardpack

Shop: No

Catering: Yes if pre-booked

Kids track: Beginners' circle

Bike hire: Yes (beginners and trail bikes)

Coaching: Yes

Toilets/wash block: Yes

Opening times: Weekdays 6-9pm,
Weekends - morning and afternoon sessions

Difficulty: Low/medium

Enjoyment Factor: High – flowing AX style

Suitability: Everyone

Session length: 11 minutes

Groups: Auto/65, SW, BW, Rookies, Adults



Project

AFTER A BRIEF END OF SEASON REST DBR PROJECT PILOT JOE CADWALLADER'S BEEN ON THE RECEIVING END OF A BEASTING AS THE WORK BEGINS FOR THE 2017 SEASON...

Words by **Sean Lawless** Photos by **Immy Jones**

We've taken a couple of months off from our DBR Project but that doesn't mean that Joe Cadwallader has been taking it easy – far

from it in fact!

After a bit of a breather at the end of the season Joe's been receiving a non-stop beating from RMJ Academy boss Richard-Mike Jones but the good news for the 17-year-old is that the hard work is paying off...

"It's not been as hard as I expected it to be," says Joe, "it's been harder! I didn't think it was going to be nearly as tough but I'm coping. It's going well."

The training schedule is intensive as Rich-Mike and the team at Liverpool John Moores University put him through his paces. "We're doing a lot of bike time at the moment with motos and sprints. Sometimes it's circuits in the morning and then afterwards they come up with something to really ruin me! In the gym we're doing a lot of rowing, circuits, strength tests – pretty much everything to be honest."

"It's definitely working. On the bike I'm feeling a lot stronger. I'm not getting as blown out as easily and over bumps I'm able to stand up earlier and get through them easier without it being a big strain."

His first off-season training programme with the RMJ Academy has also helped to highlight weaknesses in previous winter schedules he's followed.

"I think the fault that I had was before I didn't do many motos in my training but now we're smashing out 35-minute motos. The races are 18 minutes long at the MXY2 rounds so I'm confident that the fitness side of it will be a box

ticked and I'll be used to going the distance and pushing hard."

What could have been a living hell has also been helped by Joe's new bike – a 2017 FC 250 Husqvarna UK machine.

"The bike's great. I've got a brand new one and we're just keeping it standard at the moment. There's no problem with that at all – as a stock machine it's already raceable. It's real fast and the suspension's improved so I could probably race it straight out of the box."

When we caught up with him in mid-December, academy boss Rich-Mike was happy with Joe's progress – and happy with the pain he's inflicted on the teenaged talent...

"We're nearly at the Christmas break and Joe – like all the riders – is getting really tired now," he says. "Since the start of November he's been really hard at it with fitness testing, weight training and actual training on the bike. He's been training really, really hard with the idea being that he'll be ready for a break between Christmas and New Year."

"Truth be told he's pretty knackered but we've only got a week to go and then he can back it off over Christmas. That said, it's not as though he's looking tired in his training, if anything it's the opposite. On the bike he's obviously getting stronger and the plan is that after the break he'll carry his gains into the New Year and feel the benefit of all the hard work."

Rich-Mike has lined up a busy few months for Joe and plans to use his pre-season schedule to evaluate the results of the off-season programme.

"We're planning on racing the EMX250 class at the international at Redsand in January – that'll be Joe's first race of the year – so we'll probably stop in the South of France on the way

down if the weather's okay or in Northern Spain. After that – again, weather permitting – we'll probably stop off on the way back in Northern France to ride some sand ready for his second pre-season race which will be the Hawkstone International."

"We wouldn't normally do a race as early on in the season as Redsand but the boys are working hard and it gives us a great opportunity to see where we're at."

Rather than set specific goals, Rich-Mike's taking a more fluid approach to 2017 as far as Joe is concerned.

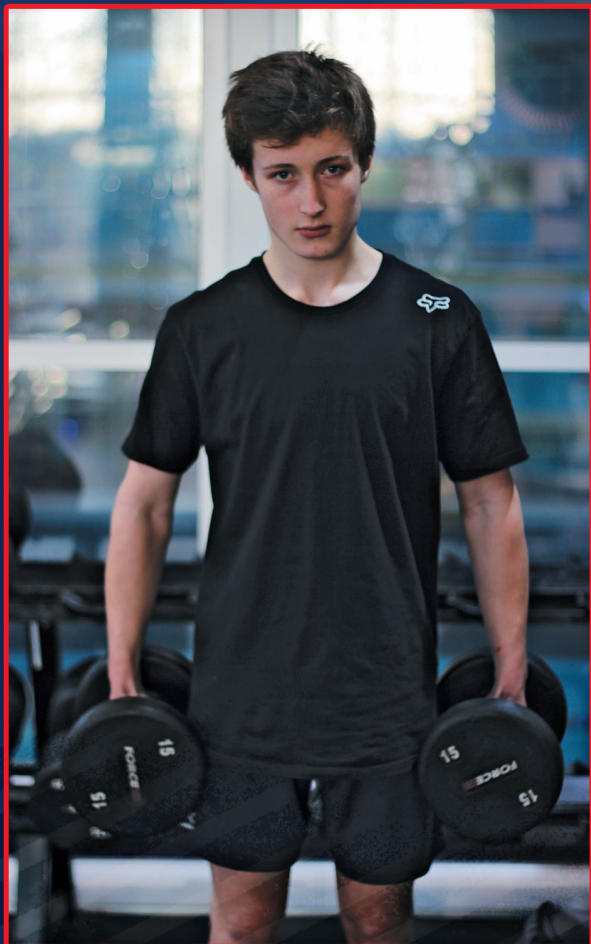
"My goal for Joe is simply for him to be a front-runner. I want him to show people what he can do. I don't expect my riders to perform at their best every time they go out – that's unrealistic – but I do expect them to give 100 per cent every single time."

"I know he'll have good days and bad days and on his good days I expect him to be a winner and on his bad days I'd like to see him ride smart and have good, solid, consistent results and put himself in a position to either win a championship or be a championship contender."

Joe's 2017 schedule centres on the Maxxis and Michelin MX Nationals MXY2 championships and Rich-Mike expects him to rise to the occasion this year.

"I want him to mature as a racer. There are no issues with his speed and there will be no issues with his fitness, that's for sure – it's already good enough to go racing now."

DBR will be following Joe and the RMJ Academy Husqvarna every month so stay tuned for further updates...





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ENDURO NEWBIE DAN GROVE TAKES THE EXC-F FOR A SPIN AT THE FRIENDS OF HUCK CHARITY RACE

Words by **Dan Grove** Photos by **Chris Monk**

With less than three hours on the bike – I know this because the 350 EXC-F has an on board computer with many helpful features such as lap recording, total hours, miles, sessions etc – I thought it was only right to sign up to race an enduro.

I did some research before sending my entry form in and it sounded like a relatively basic one which would be an ideal testing ground for me and the bike. I entered with no expectations of a decent result and solely did it for getting time in on the bike on a long lap over terrain that the bike was built for.

The event itself was held by the Mercian Dirt Riders labelling the event as a Friends of Huck Charity Race so if I can help out a charity or charities by riding a dirt bike then I can't think of a better way of donating as part of everyone's entry fee went to charity which is pretty awesome.

Another thing that is awesome is that I ended up third in the Clubman 4-stroke class! I planned on doing two stops as the bike still had less than three hours on it before the race however after the first stop nothing that my buddy Luke checked – the spokes, sprocket bolts, anything with an

8 or 10mm hex head – had shown any signs of coming loose so it was decided I'd ride to the end of the 2.5 hour race after my initial stop at 50 minutes.

I didn't need to make any adjustments to the bike and as I had no intention of going for the win it was a 'leisurely' pit stop with not much rushing going on, the day was purely to get used to the bike in a proper enduro environment. I was annoyed when I saw that my best lap time was competitive though – even in the expert class it was in the ball park – and had I have got another lap in I may have got a better result! Never mind...

Besides the normal prep that goes into any race, I was advised by the mechanic at KTM to remove the horn as if you fall onto this or a low branch or a track post hits it, it can make a real mess of the radiator. So as I'm not using the bike on the road I took it off.

With the connector exposed I cut a couple of fingers off of a latex glove, tightly taped it up to keep the moisture out and then zip tied it to the other wires connected to the frame. Sorted.

There was one section of the course that went across a stubble field and I got the bike up to 69mph which was a bit crazy and I kept trying

to beat that every lap but failed. I still had another gear to change up to as well...

While riding and watching others it became really apparent as to what you need to have half a chance in enduro and to make your riding a little bit easier. They are pretty basic components and the KTM comes as standard with them which might explain why most enduro riders ride KTMs. These parts are – handguards, a hydraulic clutch, and grippy tyres.

An electric start is also really useful but luckily on this day I didn't need to start in any tricky locations although I did drop the bike once.

Handguards protect your hands from all sorts of damage in the form of roost and especially trees as they'll never move.

Hydraulic clutches should come stock on all bikes I think as the feel is consistent and light so after a long time in the saddle you won't fatigue as much as you would with a cable. Plus you don't have to lube it like you do with a cable system.

The standard tyres are Maxxis (and also road legal) and the front let me get away with some serious late braking to the point where I couldn't believe that I stopped and made the turn on more than one occasion, on grass and the stubble field

DAN GROVE

The 30-Year-Old Virgin!



sections. I think the rear may need an upgrade though*as it really lacked grip on the grassy off cambers although it worked well on the firmer sections.

Both tyres seemed to grip well on the tree roots that were coming through in some of the corners which took some adjusting to as with motocross tyres and suspension the bike wants to deflect off of them which results in a not ideal riding experience. So it took a while to get used to the bike not reacting how I expected it to.

The only imminent changes that I need to make to the bike are definitely a sump guard and a front disc guard for obvious reasons and I need to practice riding rock gardens and getting over fallen trees (aka passing difficult logs - Sully). I dragged the frame rails on a log crossing most laps which I wasn't really keen on but the frame was fine and barely scratched after washing the bike.

I'm also keen to try a different seat cover because although the standard cover is fine in most situations, when it's wet it doesn't offer much grip at all so this is something that I'm looking to address so that I get a consistent feel from the bike in all conditions.

KTM have a huge Powerparts catalogue (which is their own brand of aftermarket hardware) that I'm going to have a look through to see if there's anything in it that'll suit my needs. Besides that, I'm looking forward to finding some more enduros to race this winter to give his bike a real good test and see how it fairs through a British winter...

BURNICLE'S BEAT

V ienne se WHIRL!



PERCHED HIGH ON AN AUSTRIAN HILLSIDE – JUST A STONE'S THROW FROM VIENNA – SITTENDORF REGULARLY HOSTED THE 500CC GP SEASON-OPENER IN THE EIGHTIES AND PROVED TO BE A FAIRLY FEARSOME TEST FOR THE MX ELITE...

Words and photos by Jack Burnicle

Oatar has in recent years become established as the season opening motocross grand prix – a mantle regularly worn in motocross folklore by Spain and Austria. While Sabadell near Barcelona would kick off 250GPs, Sittendorf, 30 miles west of Vienna in Lower Austria would start the 500cc season rolling in April most years and is still in regular use on a similar date as a round of the 'Motocross-Fahrer Österreichs'!

Almost all the heavy hitters of 500cc MX racing triumphed round this demanding terrain, highlighted by a huge, gruesomely rocky climb and lined in parts by quaint wooden fencing.

Between 1959 and 1965 Sten Lundin and Rolf Tibblin alternated, slender beanpole Sten victorious four times to big Rolf's three. East Germany's Paul Freidrichs won in 1966 and Russian Gunnar Draugs scored his only ever grand prix success in '67 before Sweden hit back, Bengt Aberg securing a hat-trick through to 1970.

Roger De Coster won three times during the seventies, Brad Lackey twice. Graham Noyce kicked off his world title winning 1979 season with an Austrian win as did Husqvarna's Heikki Mikkola in 1974 and a year earlier Czech CZ star Jiri Stodulka scored his only GP win. Into the eighties Hakan Carlqvist, the last Swedish

giant, opened his championship winning 1983 season with an Austrian victory and his great rival Andre Malherbe (Honda) secured a hat-trick, including the two years previous to my first visit in 1987.

Ironically, 1987 saw Austria demoted to the third round in a series depleted by Malherbe's retirement and his team-mate Eric Geboers' departure, on HRC orders, to the quarter-litre class. The opening GP at Yunqueira, near Madrid, was a glutinous mudfest dominated by reigning champion Dave Thorpe. But in a roasting second round at Pernes les Fontaine in France Carlqvist, dropped by Yamaha and now a privateer mounted on a Mobil Kawasaki, beat >>



Rob Andrews (Honda 47) holeshots from Carlqvist (8) Kinigadner (10) Thorpe (1) Nicoll (7) Trampas Parker (72) and wild Italian Franco Rossi (63) who lasted a lap!



All adoring eyes on home hero Heinz Kinigadner as he leads race two



Beautiful brand new YZM of Leif Persson rounds Dutchman Carlo Hulsen



First moto winner Hakan Carlqvist soars over the massive hilltop



Georges Jobe rescued a rostrum finish despite a first-race puncture

the factory Honda in a gripping first moto. Thorpe hit back to win overall and arrived in Austria 20 points clear of 'Carla' in the world championship. But David had never sampled success at Sittendorf since his first ever GP moto win there on a Kawasaki in 1982!

This was officially the 31st 'Grosser Prix von Österreich'. It offered the winner prize money per race of 1,250 Swiss francs down to 180 francs for 25th place. The picturesque hillside setting, once home to a secret world war two underground bomb factory, welcomed a mammoth entry list of 78 riders including a dozen Brits, nine of whom made it through timed qualifying sessions to the 40 rider grid.

A wide, grassy start straight swooped

up into a fast right hander and while Honda privateer Rob Andrews – fourth overall in Spain – holeshot from Kurt Nicoll's Kawasaki while Thorpe, cut off by spectacular American newcomer 'Bullet' Billy Liles, was buried at the back before commencing a typically robust recovery. Nicoll led for nine laps with Carla in pursuit and looked a likely first-time GP moto winner until thin, mean drizzle turned the course into a skidpan.

After seven years combating the jackhammer vibrations of his YZ490 Yamaha with heavily taped hands Carlqvist, revelling in the smooth power of his KX500, quickly cut back Nicoll's nine second advantage and eventually took a popular 10 second win. Equally acclaimed by the big crowd was

home hero Heinz Kinigadner (KTM) in third place ahead of Thorpe, who fought past Andrews, Leif Persson (Yamaha) and Georges Jobe (Honda), slowed by a flat rear tyre, to claim fourth and maintain his title lead. But already punctures were taking their toll and would ultimately prove pivotal in the afternoon – indeed, the championship outcome. Jobe survived but both Billy Liles and Berkshireman Andy Nicholls were out before half-distance.

Andrews and his John Banks Honda once more sprang to the front in race two from Kinigadner, Kees van der Ven (KTM) and another rookie American called Trampas Parker, who had infuriated Carlqvist by obstructing him when being lapped in race one! Thorpe, 20th, set about another



Spectacular series rookie Bullet Billy Liles on his second race charge to third place



GP winner Thorpe flanked by joint runners-up Kinigadner (left) and Jobe

purposeful pursuit as 'Kini' grabbed the lead from team-mate van der Ven on lap two to a deafening roar from the crowd.

Andrews caught trackside fencing in his rear sprocket as the relentless Thorpe eventually punched his way past Kini to take the lead on lap 10. Then a deathly hush descended as Heinz crashed deep in the valley and failed to re-emerge. Nicoll had pitted to change a punctured rear wheel and Carlqvist, a comfortable third with overall victory in his grasp, suffered the same fate but soldiered on until the rear end let go and he fell heavily, dislocating his elbow.

Kinigadner remounted to rescue eighth place as Liles launched an exhilarating charge on his Cinti Kawasaki, eventually passing Jobe

to reach third behind Thorpe and van der Ven. And Willie Simpson (Honda), 21st ahead of Parker in race one, was put out by, yes, a puncture!

So Dave Thorpe, mounting the rostrum alongside joint runners-up Jobe and Kinigadner, extended his title lead to a commanding 33 points after finally achieving victory at Sittendorf while gallant title rival Hakan Carlqvist returned from hospital that evening, his plastered left elbow in a sling. "He's 'istory ace," quoth unsympathetic Kawasaki boss Alec Wright as we left the track. But though his 1987 challenge looked over Carla wasn't finished yet and neither was Sittendorf. The iconic Austrian venue would regain its rightful status as the opening round



Rob Andrews led both motos on his Honda

HOLESHOT HERO!

Ace starter Rob Andrews relives some Sittendorf highs and lows . . .

Rob Andrews made his 500GP debut at Sittendorf in 1985. "It was the furthest I'd ever driven to a race!" he recalls wryly. "Bought an atlas and drove for two days. We knew it was near Vienna but got lost it until it dawned on us that it was called 'Wien' on the map!

"So I turned up for my first 500GP and found this spectacular track in stunning scenery but with a sheet of jagged rock for the last 40 yards up a steep hill in the middle. It was like a cliff! 'How are we supposed to get up that?'. But no-one said anything. It was obviously accepted as the norm.

"I thought 'blimey, these 500GP guys are hard.' It was scary. You had to back off as you reached the top because if you left the throttle on it would just kick off sideways! It was always rocky everywhere. The berm at the bottom wore through to rock and the track crossed a public road down in the valley. But at least they put some dirt on the hill in 1986.

"Andrews failed to qualify his Maico in '85 but the following year fared much better on a Kawasaki. "Alec Wright got me some 'factory tyres' from Dunlop. They looked the same as my normal ones but were unbelievably grippy on the rocks! I got good starts, finished level on points with Jobe and Persson behind Malherbe, won £780 and lay second in the world!"

So what about those 1987 holeshots? "They used a forward falling gate with no sleeper behind you," he smiles craftily. "You could pull back, watch the starter and go when his head moved!" Seventh in race one equalled his first moto result a year earlier. "But in race two I got that evil green netting into my back wheel and it locked up. I still remember every turn and bump. Everything you think of as 500GP racing was there in that track. It was a fearsome place!"

of the world championship in 1988, when Thorpe won again. In fact David went on to complete a Sittendorf hat-trick in 1990 after also winning when the Austrian GP temporarily absconded to Schwanenstadt in 1989. So four wins put him level with Sten Lundin as the most successful rider in Austrian 500 MXGP history!

Italian hotshot Franco Rossi and Belgian trio Johan Boonen, Joel Smets and Jacky Martens would also enjoy the spoils at Sittendorf until the grand prix curtain finally fell on this unique venue in 1996. But for almost four decades, alongside equally legendary locations like Namur, Ruskeasanta, Ettelbruck, Payerne and Hawkstone Park, Sittendorf formed the backbone of 500cc grand prix motocross... |

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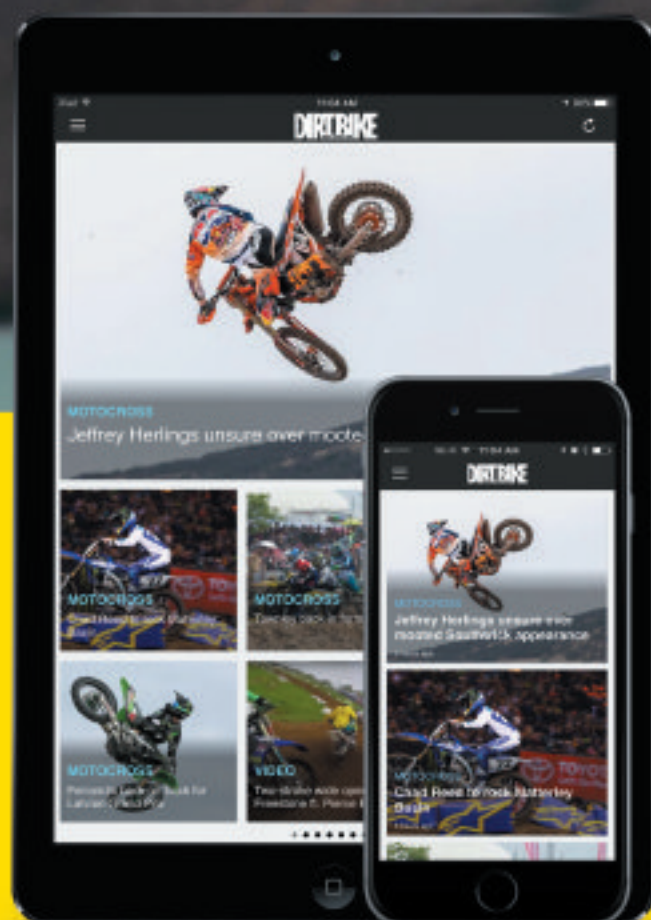


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BACK IN

BLUE!

THREE-TIME BRITISH CHAMPION SHAUN SIMPSON HAS RETURNED TO THE BRAND THAT POWERED HIM TO HIS FIRST EVER GP VICTORY - CAN HE FIND THAT WINNING FEELING AGAIN IN 2017?

Words by Adam Wheeler Photos by Ray Archer

Shaun Simpson's popularity has a lot to do with his success on British soil. He's also a grounded and impossibly-friendly character with family stock that stretches back into the sport like the roots of an old oak. There is also something relatable about him, an underdog quality and a sense that although the Grand Prix cookie has been in his reach it's never really crumbled in his direction...

When Simpson had his shot with factory KTM in 2009 he had the misfortune to suffer from a faulty 250SX-F headstock that sent him into a tree and led to a broken left leg, only weeks after he'd won his very first Grand Prix moto at Valkenswaard. 2009 had been his golden chance in MX2. By 2010 the category was already being invaded by the likes of Herlings, Roczen and Musquin.

His MX1/MXGP debut year was impressive but was clumsily handled in the environment of the now defunct 24MX team. A first touch with Yamaha in 2012 was somewhat unstable. He was Steve Dixon's rider in an annex project but then pitched into the factory team when Yamaha Motor Europe suffered an injury crisis. Simpson was also learning to deal with life with a gluten allergy – a condition that hampered him until his physical

malaise was diagnosed.

Missing out on a renewal with Yamaha meant a slightly troubling time with an abortive attempt to ride with TM and then finally a temporary union with JK SRS Gebben that brought him back to the YZ and showed his top five potential. And then came that emphatic day in the Dutch sand at the end of the 2013 campaign when the then 25-year-old had shocked the world by winning as a privateer.

Shaun would prosper with KTM in 2014 and 2015 but again there was something missing. He had the quite unique situation with Roger Magee's set-up to embark on his own programme of development and racing but then lacked the extra back-up and resources to make the step from a rider occasionally on the periphery of the podium to one that could regularly hunt trophies.

He found the support structure he needed with Steve Turner's outfit for 2016 and with assurances from the Austrians – that he'd helped significantly with 2015 victory at Assen in the Netherlands and another podium finish at Leon in Mexico with works equipment – for extra assistance.

The 2016 450SX-F was not the easiest handling motorcycle at a time when Simpson had factory engines >>>







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Professional riders like Shaun Simpson manage to keep their cool at photo shoots even after making huge mistakes like leaning on sticky air filters in new riding kit...

but KTM's gaze of affection had narrowed. The fact that his close ties with WP Performance Systems helped (brother Stefan works in the race service dept and Simpson also had a testing role with the firm) but with Turner's decision to dissolve his racing interests late in the summer of '16 Shaun was again wondering where he's career would turn next.

A solid and productive relationship with businessman, sponsor and now fully-fledged team owner Louis Vosters prospered when the Dutchman wanted to take a deeper role in the MXGP paddock aside from just plastering his company Wilvo's name on the Turner and Yamaha Standing Construct trucks.

Vosters admires Simpson's maturity, work ethic and slowly ripening potential for results. Once Vosters had purchased Tim Mathys' Standing Construct set-up he immediately opened dialogue with #24. Confirmation of continued work with Yamaha Motor Europe followed as the official MXGP satellite effort and then Vosters began to look for a second rider when Alex Tonkov's visa complications in Russia would start to make his contract with YME look decidedly shaky. A fan of the aggressive MX2 racer, Vosters waited and waited until deciding that MXGP 'rookie' Arnaud Tonus – Simpson's 2012 team-mate in the Dixon line-up – was too good an opportunity to miss.

From concerning unemployment status one moment to a sure two-year footing at Wilvo – with a seemingly committed and very eager team principal – and the chance to swing a boot over a YZ450F again was another dizzying episode in Shaun's 11 year Grand Prix career.

Over a long FaceTime chat with the 28 year old in his Scottish abode Simpson comes across as a content man. Married in October to Rachel and currently deep into a training schedule that has started earlier compared to his usual routine – although he is still finding sufficient breaks to satisfy a seemingly new addiction to golf – he is more than happy to discuss his fresh orientation for 2017. We've known Shaun a long time and it is hard to recall the three-times British Champ sounding quite so upbeat and bullish....

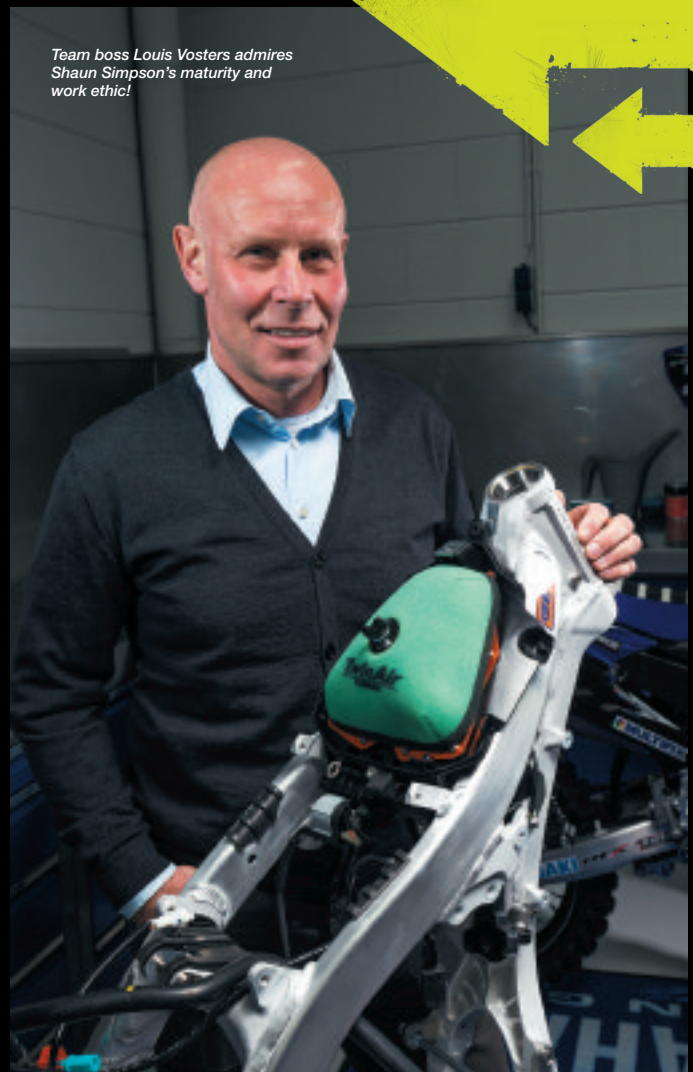
DBR: Talking of his transfer to the factory KTM team in MotoGP Bradley Smith ruminated that a rider might need up to six months to fully blend with a new environment and crew. Any thoughts on what it might take for you?

SS: "I would say it is slightly different for me because being with Steve Turner's team I was only 3-400 yards away from the Wilvo guys this year. I have worked reasonably closely with Louis before, my practice mechanic is staying the same and the chief mechanic for the team is Rene Ebbert who I have known for years.

"So it is not like I need to learn these guys – there is already

>>

Team boss Louis Vosters admires Shaun Simpson's maturity and work ethic!



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some sort of understanding even if I know that working together can be a different dynamic. Honestly though I feel something quite different compared to any other team I've had. There are a few guys around – there are two race mechanics, two practice mechanics, Louis, the chief engine guy and one or two others for logistics and parts. There are seven or eight in the mix and Tonus and I on top of that.

"It's by no means a small team but it doesn't feel that way. It feels like everyone wants to help each other and they all have a significant role and there is an organised system that everything runs to. It is all clean-cut, set and there is a plan.

"For instance I received an email the other day with my whole plan for January – which I had some input – but they had a meeting and wrote out what, where, when and why. It is all nicely organised and we have our WhatsApp group among the team where everyone chips in now and again. I went riding the other day and sent a cheesy thumbs-up next to a picture of my bike saying 'thanks guys everything's okay' and you just get nice replies back and the whole environment is one of fun."

DBR: They say there is not huge variation among the production bikes these days but did you notice a difference between the Yamaha and the KTM when you jumped on it for the first time?

SS: "I have to say after three years with a steel-framed KTM it was quite different to go back to a Japanese aluminium chassis and the handling characteristics that come with that – a smoother ride and more forgiving feel with the way the chassis works and reacts.

"I've been used to the abundance of KTM

power over the last few years although I'd had question marks with my engine this season and was looking for a bit more power in other areas. I was pleasantly surprised when I jumped on a totally stock Yamaha for the first time and the power was very usable. I definitely needed more but I was positive we could make something of the engine.

"Yamaha hadn't really changed the main engine design since I had last ridden the bike so I know the potential is there and it was reassuring to confirm those thoughts and to start working towards my race spec engine in 2017. We are working quite closely with GYTR so we have their parts but the plan of attack is to work on the motor, give feedback and maybe then see where we can go with [renowned Dutch tuner] John Volleberg. At the moment I would like more bottom and more top – I'm happy with the middle. If we had a bit more on the top and bottom then we have a winning motorcycle."

DBR: You spent time testing in Belgium in November but it sounds like you are pretty happy with the state of readiness already for 2017...

SS: "The guys in the workshop are screaming out for parts but I also think that if we went to Qatar tomorrow then we have 90 per cent of what we need. I remember a couple of seasons ago if I had a standard bike to be hacking around on at his time of year I would thank my lucky stars. I am positive that we are in a good position with the right guys pulling the right strings and a lot of experience on the team and people with a lot of contacts.

"We are drawing in this enthusiasm from technical partners, backers, sponsors and

people that want to be allied with the team. We did a test with KYB last week and it so motivating to see them so keen and eager to get us to a point where we were really happy. We'll do at least another two tests before Qatar – one in January and one in early February. Having motivated people is key and that's what we been aiming for when selecting our partners.

"Louis is of the opinion that if he needs to buy it then he will but if someone is willing to give a good product and they are motivated then this is the sort of thing we want. An example is Gaerne boots – they are coming on board and will custom fit stuff for Arnaud and I and are aiming to give us the best possible support with the product. There is a lot of excitement in a lot of areas. The fire is burning and I hope it continues."

DBR: Everything sounds pretty rosy and you also got married recently but is there anything left over from 2016 that you're disappointed about?

SS: "There was a lot going on but I honestly feel that there was more of a mix-up for me to cope with for the 2016 season. That was the biggest change of my career – my dad retired, Rachel moved in and we planned a wedding, I was back into more of a 'factory' set-up with my practice bikes being done for me and being able to just concentrate on my riding and training. There were many positive things but it was a lot to take on board in the space of one season. Even learning the whole Steve Turner crew – that was harder than gelling with the crew I have now for reasons I mentioned already.

"So for 2017 everything is a bit more stable. Rachel and I are married and she's had a full >>>



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year with me in Belgium and at the races. I'm just so motivated to be with this team and a bike I did not want to leave at the end of 2013. There is even possibly more motivation for me now than there was leaving the Yamaha and getting on the KTM for 2014.

"I had three pretty good years on the KTM – two were really good and then 2016 that didn't deliver as much as I hoped. If things flow well now and the jigsaw clicks together then I am genuinely excited at how well we could go. I took a month off after the Nations and by the time we get to January I will have two months of training under my belt.

"Usually I would have done things like Weston or an event like Lille Supercross and by the turn of January I would have had half the amount of prep of what I currently do. I'm relaxed, fitter and better prepared and instead of going to Qatar thinking 'let's get some nice consistent results and go from there' I want to aim to do the business. I need to change my mentality in this direction. I know 15 other guys will be thinking the same thing but that's the change I will make for 2017 and set Qatar as

the 'go' time.

"My motivation to get back on the Yamaha is higher than it's ever been for any team or a bike or at any stage and in a class where I know I can win races and GPs. If the jigsaw clicks together then I am genuinely excited at how well things could actually be."

DBR: Has 2016 affected any of that thinking? It was the first time in quite a few years where the sport gave you a decent kick – the broken hand and the scary collision in Mexico with Alessandro Lupino...

SS: "I'm going to focus my goals on the world championship...and who knows how many years I have left to do so? I'm excited that I can prioritise MXGP and in the past few seasons there was always a point where a lot of focus turned to the British Championship, especially this year when my world championship went up the swanny. Of course I wanted to finish in the top 10 but it turned to winning the British."

DBR: What do you still feel that you need to work on then to reverse that?

SS: "I need to get out of the gate. The crash in Spain that led to the hand injury wouldn't have happened if I wasn't hustling and bustling. The crash in Mexico wouldn't have happened if I wasn't buried in the pack. The goal is to get out front, stay out of trouble and get the results I feel I need as often as possible.

"It was the same at Assen. I could have won that second moto quite easily with a top five start but I was in the final third of the pack in the first corner and crashed. I was trying to come through and was getting filled-in and crashed again.

"If you look at guys like Max Nagl, Evgeny Bobryshev or Tony Cairoli they are so good at making those starts week-in week-out – especially someone like Bobby, he is just consistently top five. Nagl and Cairoli have traditionally been good starters because they work so hard on it.

"There will be more pressure in the gate in 2017 because of the metal mesh system and come Qatar everyone will be thinking 'how is this going to be?'. It is going to be exciting and I hope I can make these positive changes but >>



The full Wilvo Yamaha squad – minus Simpson's Swiss team-mate Arnaud Tonus...

by no means do I feel knocked back or had my confidence affected by an up-and-down season – I'm actually more motivated to rectify that and get back to where I have been previously."

DBR: You've been a bit non-committal about the British Championship for 2017. It now looks like you won't be doing it. So when can British fans see you race? Any chance of some wild-card appearances? What's the plan and how do you feel about it?

SS: "It is hard not to be on the fence about it. In some ways I am happy I am not doing it because I feel I only have 'x' amount of years left at GP level and I want to give it a good crack. This next year or two could be my best chance to really go for it. On the other hand it is a massive shame because my fans in Britain have been a huge part of my Simpson Army clan for the last few years. I'm quite heavily into giving something back to my fans and it is a shame I won't be able to race at least once a

month in the UK.

"I'm looking forward to still filling my weekends with a Dutch, Belgian or International race here or there because I like to race and keep myself sharp but I've got to look at the travel and cost of getting to these UK races and if it doesn't add up for me or my team to go then it isn't the best idea to wear myself out just to keep up appearances.

"Having said that I will definitely be at Hawkstone Park for the International and I aim to race Canada Heights as well because it's a close one. I'll have to take the mixed feelings about the British on the chin for 2017. If Yamaha would have been very motivated for me to do it then I would have happily considered, and to be fair to Louis he said if I wanted to race the full series then I was welcome to but it wasn't about that. I think the championship also needs to look at how they entice the top guys and keeps MXGP riders wanting to take part in eight rounds as well as 19 Grands Prix."

DBR: Your comment about wanting to hit Qatar hard – you're going to be 29 in the first phases of the season. How do you feel about your place in MXGP now and going against younger athletes like Gajser, Herlings, Febvre...

SS: "Apart from having goals like consistency and wanting to be injury free...I think your objectives do shift with circumstances. My whole career – and from the point where I realised I was a professional motocrosser and actually lucky enough to do what I do – my goal was to be a world champion and strangely enough I feel deep down inside me that this can still be realised. If I say it, and it never happens, then I don't really care...but if I can say it and I get even remotely close then I know I have given it my best shot.

"The crew, the bike, the set-up I have at the moment is on-point. They are doing what they can from their end and I'm doing as much as I can from my end, like learning from my



SIMPSON ON...

HERLINGS COMING INTO THE CLASS

"I've known Jeffrey for quite a few years now and he was always the slightly cocky kid with so much raw talent and speed. He works as hard as anyone if not harder when it comes to hours on the bike. I think he has changed a bit in the last few years, almost like the swagger has become more exaggerated. I think he has a chip on his shoulder about the sport somewhere and I do wonder if he thinks it will be easy to come in and dominate next year.

"Two rookies have won back-to-back titles and he believes he can be the third. I'm not saying he won't do it...but I think it will be a damn sight harder than he thinks. I believe he'll have to be careful not to really hang it out like he has done a few times in the last few years because he'll end up in the dust. He'll be one to watch for sure but we'll have to see if it is for the right or wrong reasons."

GOING FOR BRAGGING RIGHTS N THE SAND...

"It's going to be interesting but I definitely believe Jeffrey is a better sand rider than me. He has been brought up in it since he was four of five whereas I have only honed my skills in the last 10 years and become a very good sand rider. Given a good bike set-up and the right start I can race Cairoli on any day in the sand and he raced Jeffrey hard at the Nations in 2012. On the right day, right circumstances and right set of bumps you never know – we could give him a good battle."

PREP SO FAR FOR THE METAL MESH START GATE...

Unfortunately they changed the spec of the metal just a week before we are talking and we had one on order. We couldn't be in a better position having a metal fabrication business as a title sponsor! We won't be short on a bit of metal or two. So I haven't tried it myself yet but it will come.

"I have got Jason Moir from Dyce Carriers – my long-time sponsor from back home – getting something made for me so I can practice starts in Scotland in the next couple of weeks and by the time I get to Belgium we'll have a full gate replica to take to tracks where we are testing or riding.

"I think you'll see a lot of people working on electronics, clutch control and clutch set-up to try and find the right amount of grip. I think it is quite a good thing because you won't have that inconsistency of the ground behind the gate or the variables that come into play. It is a decision that could be the future...we'll have to see how it will turn out."

THE NUMBER OF GPS

"Well, it is only one more than we had in 2016 but it definitely prolongs the period that we need to be in peak condition. There is no respite in the middle of the season. Usually there is a bit of a period where you could catch your breath and recover or prepare for something like Lommel or Assen but it looks tight. The teams and the riders will just have to crack on and I think I will have a better evaluation to offer you at the end of the year...but I don't think there will be much of a difference."

MXON TEAM SELECTION

"I honestly think that the guys selecting the team will look at those at the sharp end of MXGP and won't discount them – British Championship appearances or not. I know that if I do my job well enough then I will be near the top of the list or one of the candidates for the team.

"One problem we'll have next year is the MX2 rider. Someone will have to drop to the 250 unless Adam Sterry – who could very easily bang in some podiums and be Britain's new star guy in MX2 – or Ben Watson have very strong seasons. There is also quite a fight in the MXGP class for just two spots. There are a few candidates and that's great because it makes our chances of having a strong team even better for what will be a great occasion.

"I'm not thinking that far ahead but I also cannot see a Team GB without me in it! I've had ups and downs and some bad luck at the Nations but I've always deserved my spot and I want to keep it that way for another couple of years."

mistakes, changing my programme, my fitness regime and little decisions in my day-to-day life in a positive way. It's like they say 'if you always bake a cake with the same ingredients then the cake will always come out or taste the same'. You have to change something to get a different cake. We'll see what comes out of the oven at Qatar and by the middle of next year."

DBR: Gajser and the confidence, package and momentum he had in 2016 is going to be the benchmark for everyone in 2017...

SS: "There is no way I can match him for style, aggression and technique. What I can match him on is determination, consistency and really working hard on those small, fine details. I will probably never look as fast as Gajser but I know that if I put my wheels where I want them to go and open the throttle when I want to get grip and acceleration then I can compete with someone like that. Looking from the outside it might seem unlikely but knowing what I feel I believe I can race with those guys every week, on every track, defend my lines and make passes."

D I R T B I K E RYDER!

**THE HOTTEST PROPERTY IN US AMATEUR RACING,
11-YEAR-OLD RYDER DIFRANCESCO IS A CALIFORNIAN KID
WHO'S TIPPED TO GO ALL THE WAY...**

Words and photos by **Max Hind**

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a phenom as a person who is outstandingly talented or admired – a star, particularly an up-and-comer or young prodigy.

The word phenom is banded around fairly regularly in our game. It seems as though we're always hearing or talking about the next big thing. However, more often than not these prodigies fail to reach the lofty heights that were predicted for them before they'd even reached puberty. It's the tragic story of the star that shined too bright, too soon.

Right now 11-year-old Ryder DiFrancesco is the biggest name in American amateur motocross. The Californian rocketed to worldwide attention in 2011 after he claimed his first Loretta Lynn national championship at just five years old, becoming the youngest person ever to win there.

His profile surged even further that very same year once Troy Adamitis' documentary 'The Heart of Motocross' was released online. The 30-minute movie showcased the 2011 Red Bull AMA Amateur Nationals at Loretta Lynn's ranch and Ryder starred as one of the featured riders, impressing a worldwide audience before even graduating pre-school. But does this qualify the naturally cool kid as a legitimate phenom?

"Right now Ryder is showing that he has everything it takes to make it," reckons his riding coach Buddy Antunez. "For sure he's going to be slated as a phenom – people have already used that

word and I'd definitely use it to describe Ryder. He already does things at a very high level and if I can bring that intensity that he sometimes shows on the track out of him every time he throws a leg over a bike he's going to win a lot of races going forward. He's still young and some of that intensity comes with maturity as well."

The pressure of that phenom status can weigh heavily on young shoulders and motocross has more than its fair share of next big things who've cracked when the going's got tough.

"Can he handle the pressure? That's the thing that you just don't know," says Antunez. "I'd like to say yeah and be positive and say that he can and will handle it but there are just so many things that can come into play between now and when he turns pro – injuries being the number one culprit in derailing things."

Bud-Man is cautiously confident here, as is Ryder's mother Lisa.

"I definitely feel that when he was younger he didn't feel any pressure but maybe as he gets older he will a little bit," she says. "He's still very young though. Maybe he does feel it a little now but not a lot! At the moment he is still just having fun – that's his main goal!"

Ryder himself seems unfazed by his status and the expectations projected upon him.

"It's pretty cool I guess," he states. "I don't really think >>





California kid Ryder DiFrancesco styles it up at Perris Raceway

BUDDY'S BIT MAKING A CHAMPION

As with any athlete there's always room for improvement and this is something that Bud-Man is all too aware of.

"Ryder is advanced technically in a lot of areas, it's just that not all those things are automatic yet. We are trying to build those things into his muscle memory and into his thoughts so that it becomes second nature to him.

"One thing that I have been fairly successful at as a riding coach to amateurs is to teach things before the natural progression of learning said skill or technique. If we get them to learn early, then more than likely that skill is going to be far more dialled in by the time they need to utilise it at the top level.

"Take today for instance, we are working on getting him on the balls of his feet. Anybody that has ridden a dirt bike knows that's the toughest thing to do but if we start working on that now and get it to be a natural thing, to be second nature to him, then that's going to be very beneficial for him by the time he reaches supercross.

"He's also got to work on using his front brake so that's another area to focus on and I'm always, always, always trying to get my guys to carry momentum. So those are the three areas where I think we can improve upon."

about it too much..."

With over 80,000 followers on Instagram, Ryder is on a par with – if not a level above – some of the biggest names in the sport in terms of social media presence and the overall exposure he receives. He's not quite sure how it happened though.

"Dude, I don't even know how I got that many followers!"

I guess that's what three Loretta's titles and 45 national championships brings you...

This following and the reach that comes with it has earned Ryder some big-time sponsors. You'll see the Jimmy John's – a gourmet sandwich shop chain in the States – logo splattered across his bike and gear and Lisa informed us that he's just made the switch to TLD.

Ryder has arguably the top team in the

amateur paddock supporting every step of his career. Team Green Kawasaki has produced some of the best talent in American motocross history and with clear stepping stones in place the route to the pro ranks is as straight forward as feasibly possible for Ryder.

"It means a lot being part of Team Green," says Ryder. "Obviously it's a great team and they've really helped me a lot through my riding career and they'll continue to be a big help."

The route may be clear but there's certainly no rush – a promising career such as Ryder's needs to be nurtured carefully.

"He can turn pro at 16 but we aren't sure if he'll go at 16 just yet," says Lisa. "He'll be on 85s next year and most likely Superminis the year after. It all depends on his growth. He's still pretty small right now so we are just going to judge it on that."

"If he's too little to jump on a Supermini we won't put him on it. Pro Circuit just put him on an 85 and they didn't even want to do that until January. He was racing 65s last year and they didn't want him on it but we begged just to get him going on the 85. Kawasaki and Pro Circuit are all about taking time with him."

As mentioned previously, many of the greatest talents in American motocross history were cultivated and brought through the Team Green/Pro Circuit system. So how does Ryder stack up against names such as Adam Cianciarulo and Ricky Carmichael?

"Ability wise Ryder is right there with the Cianciarulos, the Tomacs and those guys at this age," claims Antunez, "but like I said he's still got some room to grow as far as intensity is concerned. Until we can achieve that we are just waiting to unlock and see what the true >>



Momentum plays a big part in Ryder's success



capability is.

"He has done it at times, it's just down to me as his riding coach to bring that out of him all the time. Hopefully as he gets older we'll start to see it come out more often and if we start to see a lot of wins we can put that tag [as one of the greatest amateur racers] on him officially."

Despite being so young this is a serious business for Ryder and his circle.

"I feel like if people knew how much effort and commitment it took they would be surprised," says Lisa. "Some people may just look from the outside and say 'oh look, he just goes riding every day' but it's so much more than that. It's 200 per cent effort from me, my husband, from Ryder and our mechanic. It's a full circle, we all need to be giving 200 per cent to make this work."

Juggling the moto life with regular life is hard for any family and the DiFrancescos are no exception.

"I think it's harder for my husband. He's

the full-time worker, he's at home bringing in the money. My life and Ryder's life are geared fully towards motocross. If we have to be at an event, we are at the event. He's home schooled and we do most of that on the road.

"So for me and Ryder everything is circled around motocross. My husband gets to come to the races – especially the big ones – but he doesn't get to take him to training or be at the track with us every day."

Ryder follows a full-on seven-days-a-week schedule that even a pro would find punishing.

"Monday and Friday I do a crossfit work-out, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday I ride and Saturday and Sunday I race. I always try to keep it exciting, pulling some whips and things to keep it fun."

It's clear after spending time with Ryder that he is simply a fun-loving kid that loves to shred laps on his dirt bike. Every time we met at the track he just couldn't wait to get back out and ride. But the fun doesn't stop

at the track.

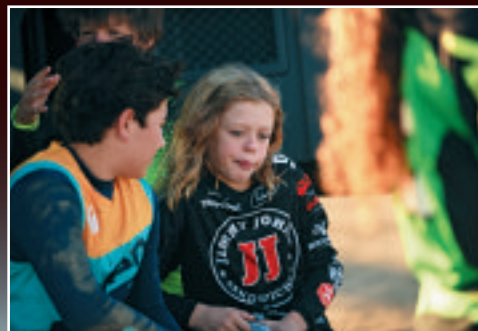
"He loves to hang out with his friends, he likes to golf, he likes to ride his scooters, he likes his Snapchat," says Lisa. "He's an 11-year-old you know, he just likes to have fun!"

With Ken Roczen as a role model it's clear what type of racer Ryder would like to become.

"In five to 10 years I'd like to be winning supercross championships. My goals for next year are to go out and win at all the big nationals on the 85 and to take home the Loretta Lynn win."

Racing is in Ryder's blood and the whole family – including his sister and two brothers – know how to turn a wheel.

"My husband's family rode flat track," says Lisa. "My husband was a national flat track riders so motorcycles and dirt bikes have been a part of the family! We all used to go out into the desert and trail ride but my older



boys also played baseball – they’re in their 20s now so they have their own jobs. His sister rode a little bit but nothing serious. When Ryder came along we stopped trail riding and went full force with motocross. We are all so very proud of him.”

Ryder’s talent on a motorcycle is crystal-clear once you’ve watched him ride and it’s easy to see why he is considered a phenom. I believe that if Ryder can keep things fun – which he seems to be good at – while following the advice of his mentors and trainers he most definitely has the potential to make the big time.

It’s been a long road for the DiFrancesco family since Ryder first made headlines and that journey stretches much further into the distance.

“Just winning Loretta’s at five years old was huge,” adds Lisa, “and then getting to be featured in one of Troy’s shows was big for him, it was neat. I think it was at that time that we realised we were stuck in this motocross world for good!”

• **FACT FILE** • **STATS N’ STUFF**

Age: 11

Hometown: Bakersfield, CA

Favourite track: “Kern County Raceway, it’s like 10 minutes from my house!”

Hobbies: “I golf and go to the skate park.”

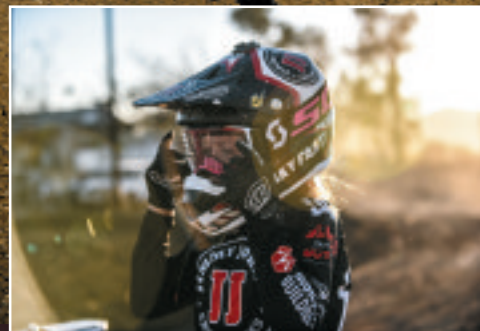
• **Biggest Rival:** “Jett Reynolds. I’ve had good races against Jett.”

• **MX or SX:** “I haven’t started riding SX yet but I prefer to watch supercross. My dream is to be a supercross champion.”

Coollest thing about being Ryder: “I dunno! I guess just getting to ride dirt bikes almost every day!”

• **Coollest achievements:** “Winning championships!”

•



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SPOTLIGHT ON...

SAM NUNN #365

Words by **Mike Gurney** Photos
by **Jonty Dixon** and **Dawn Nunn**

HOMETOWN: NEWMARKET, SUFFOLK | DOB: 22/10/02 | SPONSORS: LINGS HUSQVARNA, RFX,
FTR SUSPENSION, CARL NUNN MX TRAINING, GMX RADIATORS, PUTOLINE, MALCOLM RATHMELL
SPORT, DECADE EUROPE

After winning the 65cc class of the Fast Eddy Rock Oil Hare Scrambles series and the Weston Beach Race in his very first season of serious competition, Sam Nunn announced his arrival on the National circuit in 2013. In '14 his highlights included a third place championship finish in the GT Cup SW section and another win on the Weston beach.

The following year he was runner-up in the Route 77 Smallies, picked up a championship bronze in the MX Nationals and finished fifth in the British Youth Nationals to wrap up his Small Wheel days.

Last year – his most forceful to date in his rookie Big Wheel year – saw him take a magnificent third victory at Weston as well as scoring series third in the MX Nationals, fourth in the British Youth Nationals and then spearheading the British youth effort into second overall at the prestigious

Coupe de l'Avenir.

Rage: Hi Sam, first off, congratulations on a great BW rookie season in 2016. Is it fair to say around August you hit an even higher gear finishing the season stronger than you started it?

SN: "Thank you. Yes, towards the end of the season was definitely better for me. I'd been training hard with Carl Nunn all year and definitely benefited from having him there at the races. Then once I started getting top results I gained even more confidence and self-belief – which counts for a lot."

Rage: How did you first become interested in MX and how did you fare in the early days?

SN: "Some people mistakenly think I'm related to Carl Nunn especially as I train with him but we are not related. I got into MX through my dad – he used

to ride MX in the 1980s and then did enduro events in the early 2000s. I would go with him and ride in the youth races. I first raced in 2011 on a 65cc in a couple of cross country races and then the following year I did a local club championship (Norfolk and Suffolk) in motocross and I rode my first national season in 2013 in the Red Bull Pro Nationals."

Rage: From all the great 2016 results can you pick out a few of your most memorable highlights?

SN: "My first race win at the British Youth Nationals was really good. Coming second overall against the top 85 riders in Europe at the Coupe de l'Avenir was special and winning Weston this year for Lings Husqvarna was great feeling too as they were all there supporting me. In the Dutch Masters coming sixth overall at Mill was also really satisfying against top competition. My favourite weekend of all though

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was with the MX Nationals taking the overall victory at Hawkstone with two race wins."

Rage: With a terrific expert runner-up finish at the second round of the Enduro Fast Eddy winter series – how do you enjoy the discipline? Also are there any possible thoughts on a long-term career in Enduro?

SN: "I've done a couple more since then, and I really enjoy them. I quite like the endurance side of cross-country racing. I'm not old enough to enter British Championship events yet because you have to be 16 but would definitely like to do some in the future. For the moment though while I concentrate on MX it's really good winter training."

Rage: The 125 scene in the UK is shaping to be something really special in 2017 – maybe the best

for many years. Was it an easy decision opting to go 125?

SN: "Yeah, I think the 125 class will be tough next year. Quite a few of the 85 Big Wheel class have moved up and I think it will be really competitive. It was an easy decision to move up for me as although I could have two more years in the class I just outgrew the bike. I started to feel uncomfortable last season so dad got me a bigger frame and that just about saw me through the last few races. I couldn't wait to get on a 125 and love it now."

Rage: What are your training plans over the winter months, where are you racing in '17 and what are your long-term goals?

SN: "I'll train with Carl over the winter months and we're off to Holland for a week in February. That'll be fun for sure, then in competition it'll be MX Nationals,

British Youth Nationals and the Dutch Masters. The Masters will be quite a tough challenge going up against the fastest 125 riders in Europe. Moving forward I will work as hard as I can and just see how far it will take me in a sport that I really enjoy. It would be a good experience to do a couple of EMX rounds in 2017 but we'll have to wait and see."

Rage: Anything you'd like to add?

SN: "I would like to say a big thank you to my dad who does so much to support me as well as Lings Husqvarna for all their support, to Pete and James at FTR Suspension who help me all season, Jo and Dave at GMX Radiators, Paul at RFX, Sally at Putoline, Carly at Malcolm Rathmell Sports, Dave at Decade-Europe and everyone else who helps me out."

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JUDD TIMES!

LOOKING AHEAD TO THE 2017 JUDD RACING BRITISH PREMIER CUP...

Words and photos by Mike Gurney

Having recently inked a new two-year deal, Judd Racing will title sponsor the LSMX-Promotions National championship in 2017/18. The series will be named – the Judd Racing British Premier Cup. Following a single season hitched up to the MCF National wagon LS Promotions head honcho Claudio Bernardinelli switches codes reverting back to the ACU.

“After an enjoyable year with the MCF I’d very much like to thank both Roy Barton and Terry Hamer especially for all the hard work and help they provided,” Claudio explains. “It wasn’t an easy decision switching codes but for the future success of my championships – and in particular considering the expertise the ACU can offer with their stewards taking full charge on race weekends – I considered the ACU to be a better direction. With the ACU this support it will also allow me to fully concentrate on the promotional side of things. As a curtain raiser to the new national season we are also having an extra warm up meeting at Sherwood and all are welcome. It’s an open meeting on February 18/19.”

Claudio’s 2017 track selection includes three of his favourites as return trips to Preston Docks, Landrake and FatCat Motoparc get the nod again. And with the addition of Little Silver, Culham and provisionally Foxhill it all looks bang on with the party kicking off at Preston Docks on March 11/12.

Over the past few years in the big man’s series there’s never been much of a problem filling up the Auto ranks and this year is no exception with the 50cc division topped out before Xmas. Cornish flier Zane Stephens was the runner-up in the MCF

Under 7s championship last year and he’ll start as one of the top picks for ACU gold in this year’s Under 8s bash.

Hayden Statt will be another one to keep a close check on along with the likes of Austin Beaty and Alfie Cooper. The section is as usual split into Under 7 and Under 8 championships it’ll be full-on and hectic no doubt.

In the 65s Ollie Colmer will be determined and going flat out to right the wrongs of last season, putting behind him the disappointment of injury which blighted his championship year. Junior McKenzie Marshall will be another tough act to topple and with the Auto upgrades in the shape of Calvin Kelly, Will Haddock, Archie Jay Girdham, Spike Stevens, and the rest, here’s another section full of sizzling appeal.

In the Smallies Jaygo Beastie is the highest placed performer from last year’s MCF gang. Bailey Johnson is the reigning 65cc champ and he steps up along with 2016 Junior championship runner-up James Barker.

Over in the Biggies Ethan Tollet looks strong. Looking further down the list for a few guys who could well figure and there’s three who toughed it out at close quarters in last year’s SW gig as Jack Scally, Alfie Rickwood and Sam Atkinson cross swords again.

Looking at MXY2 and beyond, the Claudio preferred plan is to run a combined but scored separately 250F and 125cc Rookies class and also run a Junior 125cc cup in with the Adult two-stroke championship – but only if the necessary numbers come in.

If the numbers don’t add up the Junior 125cc youth runners currently down to battle away in the Adult two-stroke ranks could find themselves shifted over into MXY2. Either way the prospects look tasty for a season of top action.

In MXY2, reigning champ Howard Wainwright is on the list, he’ll have a hard time defending his title though – especially considering a round one date clash with Maxxis MXY2. If it’s not to be Howard’s year again with Harry Pritchard, Jake Curtis Stevens and Josh Greedy in the mix the Premier Cup title could be a close run thriller. Over in the 125cc rookies, amongst others it’ll be interesting to see how youngster Danny Clarke performs – he was Claudio’s b/w champ last term.

At the time of going to press Callum Beeken, Sam Price, Drew Anderson, Taylor Arnold and Liam Gale are amongst the top youth riders currently listed to be performing in the Adult two-stroke series, if they do or don’t get moved into MXY2 there’s certainly plenty of talent to keep a close eye on...

HOT DATES

Judd Racing British Premier Cup

National Warm Up	February 18/19	Sherwood
Round one	March 11/12	Preston Docks
Round two	April 22/23	Little Silver
Round three	June 3/4	FatCat
Round four	July 1/2	Landrake
Round five	July 29/30	Culham
Round six	September 9/10	Foxhill

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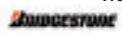
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NEWBIE!

FOR 2017 THERE'S A NEW HIGH-PROFILE TEAM IN THE PADDOCK THAT'S GOT ITS SIGHTS SET ON THE MAXXIS MX2 TITLE...

Words by **Sean Lawless** Photos by **Nuno Laranjeira**

For 2017 Husqvarna UK has entrusted its official MX2 title effort to a brand new team. If you didn't know better you'd be forgiven for thinking that's a pretty risky strategy but the truth is while the team is new the people behind it are all familiar faces on the national motocross scene.

REVO Husqvarna is the new kid on a block that the team's main players have all been around several times. Having enjoyed a sizeable presence in the paddock for a number of seasons, the big difference is this year REVO will be going for a British championship as sole title sponsor of its own team.

The team's based at the company's Daventry HQ in Northamptonshire and this year will field Mel Pocock and Jamie Carpenter. Mel's widely-regarded as a title contender while for Jamie, last year's Maxxis MX2 champion, 2017 will be a season for him to find his feet.

Team owner Mark Yates is CEO of REVO Technik, a global market-leading performance tuning software company. He's also got over 25 years of experience running motorsport teams with a successful background in saloon car racing.

The 55-year-old's first involvement in motocross was through his son but his twin passions for tuning and racing quickly elevated the sport from just a weekend hobby.

"Sam started riding when he was about 15 and was

coached for a while by Rob Herring who's a good friend," says Mark. "So we got involved in the sport at club level at the start and with our background in engine calibration when the bikes went fuel-injected – Sam had one of the very first fuel-injected Suzuki 250s in 2009 – we felt as a company, because it was new to the motocross industry, it was an area where we could get involved."

"Ultimately we started looking at developing our own stuff which was an interest to me plus with Sam's riding I had already got the bug for motocross. All the years I'd done in motor racing were great and I'd enjoyed them. I'd run my own race team with two race trucks and three cars, won a couple of British national championships – I'd done all that and got the t-shirt. The motocross thing to me was a little more simplified but I'd got the bug for it."

"We got involved with GET and then we got involved with the pro teams and all of a sudden I had a real good insight into how the motocross industry operated – the good side and the bad side."

In 2012 Mark supported Rob Hooper before running his own Kawasaki team in 2013 with young South African rider Damon Strydom racing MX2.

"At the end of '13 obviously we were doing a reasonable job and Roger Magee wanted to know if I'd get involved with his team both as a sponsor and a technical resource and support and they also wanted >>

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Sam to come in at that point.

"Sam had stopped riding and, like me, felt he was more into the technical side – building bikes, building engines – and that was when they were looking to bring Mel Pocock in and they needed him tended to."

REVO was associated with the Northern Irishman's racing activities for three years before Mark opted for the autonomy of going it alone.

"My business partner and my brother-in-law James said why don't we do just go back and do our own thing because we felt we could do a real good job. We took a lot to the table with Roger with various sponsors and a lot of them

had told me they'd support me if I wanted to do my own thing.

"It sort of all pulled together and the icing on the cake was with Husqvarna UK offering us the deal. They can see what REVO is about and how professional we are and what kind of job we do. We don't do things by half measures.

"It's not a money-making thing for us, this is something we invest heavily in and along with all the support we're receiving from all our sponsors in '17 we know we can do a good job and that's what drives me. It's the excitement and the potential of a good end result. We all know there are highs and lows but it's how you deal with them – you keep moving forwards,

don't look backwards and work together as a team to find a solution.

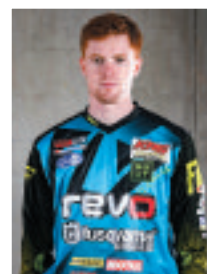
"I know what I can achieve with what I've done in my life with motor racing and the business and I've also got something I can offer to motocross. I'm confident in my skills at logistics and operating a team and I felt I could bring those to the table."

After working closely with Mel in 2014 when he narrowly missed out on the British title and then again in the second half of last season as he came back from his horrific hand injury, the 24-year-old was a natural choice for the team.

"I like to see young riders progress and I'll put a lot behind a rider if that rider gives 100 >>



Mel Pocock starts the season as one of the favourites to lift the MX2 British title...



MEL POCOCK

The contender

A two-time Maxxis MX2 runner-up and former European champion, Mel Pocock heads into the 2017 season as a serious contender for the British title.

It's been a tough two seasons for Mel since his accident at the opening round of the 2015 Maxxis series at Hilton Park but the Sussex rider has shown incredible resolve to fight his way back into contention.

After joining the Hitachi REVO Husqvarna team midway through the 2016 season he immediately made an impact, just missing out on a podium at Blaxhall and coming close at the following round at Preston Docks.

Happy to rejoin the father and son team of Mark and Sam Yates after forming a strong bond with them in 2014, the 24-year-old is aiming for the top this season.

"I'm more than happy and more than proud to be riding for Mark and Sam at REVO Husqvarna," he says. "I hope I can do a good job and deliver the sort of results they want to see and we're working hard to make sure we're ready to do that."

When he spoke to Mel in mid-December he was keen to get down to business.

"It's still early doors and we haven't done much riding. This is the time of year when I knuckle down in the gym with my trainer Sol Gilbert and try and get ahead on my fitness. We're going to Redsand in Spain next week when the real riding will start.

"We've done four days on a bike so far which has been a good little warm-up so we're ready for Spain, then we'll come back for Christmas and then go out to Spain again.

"It's always important to set high goals and my goal for next season is to win. I've been second in the British championship two times now which is enough."



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JAMIE CARPENTER

The rapid rookie

Just about to go into his first season as a pro, 17-year-old Jamie Carpenter won last year's Maxxis MX2 title which brought him to the attention of Mark Yates.

"We started speaking at the races and it all clicked," he says.

"It's a big move for me and I'm excited. I'm really happy to have the opportunity to ride for REVO Husqvarna with everything they have to offer. It's great to be part of the team.

"We haven't set any exact goals for 2017, we just know we've got to work hard throughout the winter and try and progress throughout the season as I get more experience in the MX2 class."

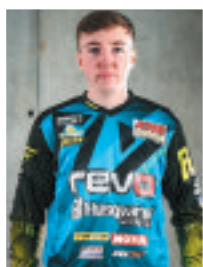
Although relatively inexperienced compared to the riders he'll line up against in the Maxxis, Jamie knows all about the highs and lows of motocross.

"I had a rough couple of years with injuries up until 2015 – I had quite a few bad ones – and then that year I managed to win the Pirelli MX2 championship and the Phoenix Tools South West Premier Junior title.

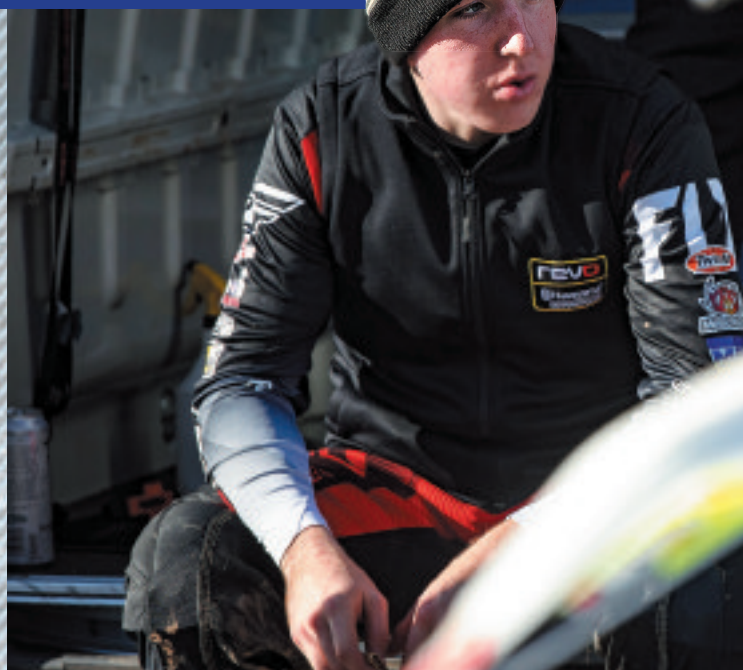
"Last year I managed to win the Maxxis MX2 championship so hopefully I can continue the progression and have a good season next year."

Jamie's already working hard and all the early indications are positive.

"Luckily our practice bikes are ready and they're quite a high spec so I've been riding quite a bit. I've been out with Mel a few times – he's a great person to go practising with and hopefully that will help bring me on heading into my first season in MX2."



After winning the 2016 MX2 title James Carpenter moves into the pro ranks this year



per cent. I'd seen Mel's commitment and what he's done with his recovery and I felt we could get behind him and work well with him. What he wants out of this works with what we want to get out of it. We're not just coming in and throwing a lot of crap at it and doing a half-assed job – it's a long-term thing and we feel we can do a good job in 2017 and be a title contender.

"That's what motivates me because the people who are involved are all so dedicated and committed and I like that."

Jamie's also a natural fit with the team's talent-nurturing ethos with the 17-year-old from

Bournemouth just about to make his debut in the pro ranks.

"Jamie is moving up from MX2 which is a big step. My expectations for Jamie are for him to progress through the course of the season with the aim to be running in the top 10 by three-quarters of the way in.

"We know he's got to find two or three seconds a lap and most of that will come in his entry and corner speed which is typically always the case. I've told him it's going to be tough and people are going to bully him so he's going to need to learn to stand up for himself.

"Already in testing he's gelling well with the

bike and we've made great headway with all the suspension work. He's getting on with Mel so as two team-mates they seem to be working together well."

After sustaining a potentially career-ending injury at the start of 2015 it's been a tough road back for Mel. As he continues to adapt to the reduced gripping power in his right hand a 450 is, for the time being, a step too far but Mark has high hopes for him in MX2.

"At the moment a 250 is where Mel needs to be. He's too old for MX2 in GPs so we're going to opt to do Europeans in '17. We're so far ahead of the game at this point and we know >>



SAM YATES

Tech #1

A man of few words, 23-year-old Sam is happier to let his spanners do the talking.

A full-time technician for the last five years, Sam's worked with riders of the calibre of James Dunn, Josh Spinks, Stuey Edmonds, Damon Strydom, Jake Nicholls and Petar Petrov.

"Mel's very easy to work with," says Sam. "He knows exactly what he wants out of the bike and what he wants by way of support and as a team we're here for him. It's great."

"He's really determined and a fighter. To come back to this level shows his character and our goal, which we feel is realistic, is to win the British championship in MX2."

"That's always been his goal and I think that's what's made him pull through his injury – I think for him to even get back on a bike again is quite incredible."



what Mel's potential is.

"He's not complaining about his hand – he's riding around that – and the determination he's shown to recover from his injury and the determination he showed going into the 2015 season and his early GP results that year I think makes him a title favourite."

"We want to win the British championship. He's been bridesmaid twice and, obviously, the last time was with us and Sam and it's something they want to achieve together."

Mel's got a proven pedigree in the European 250cc championship – he won it comfortably in 2012 – but Mark's taking a suck-it-and-see approach to this year's series.

"Our Husqvarna agreement is kind of a double deal. Part of the agreement is with the UK and part of the agreement is with Austria and to get the deal with Austria we had to agree to do a minimum of four European rounds. Obviously we'll pick the ones we like but what we've said is we'll do the first one because we'd hate to wait until three rounds in and then find we're front runners."

"So we'll go to Trentino which is the first one and see how we fare and that will dictate whether we contest the complete series or whether we pick and choose what we want to do as originally agreed."

Mark's plans extend further afield than Europe and he's set his sights on moving into the world

There are plenty of things Mel Pocock can teach younger team-mate Jamie Carpenter but how to do wheelies isn't one of them



GARY FINCH

Tech #2

Jamie Carpenter's technician Gary Finch is one of the most experienced in the business and the 54-year-old's CV reads like a who's who of racers with the likes of Max Anstie, Lewis Gregory, Martin Barr, Tommy Searle, Steven Clarke, Mike Alessi and Adam Chatfield all benefitting from his talents.

"There's too many to name to be honest," says Gary. "Some I've raced with, some I've been a practice mechanic for, some I've helped to prepare – I was working out in Cali with Max helping him to get ready for supercross. I did a bit with Tommy out in California. I've done the rounds."

"I've been involved in motocross probably since I was 14. I rode myself for probably 25 years. I was a technician at Volvo and worked my way up but, obviously, being a tech I used to look after my kit and other people's kit. Then I moved on to working with a couple of higher profile riders and started working for teams."

Gary drifted away from racing to set up a workshop for Dave Watson and then moved to KTM but he never lost his passion for working with racers and it was this drive that saw him working with Jamie in 2016.

"To be honest the whole time I wasn't trackside it was killing me. I'm that passionate about the game and I missed it so, so much. At the Dirt Bike Show [in 2015] Dave Thorpe approached me and asked if I would do the arenacross with Adam Chatfield so I'd committed to that and then Dave sort of lined me up with Jamie's dad because the Phoenix Tools team were on Honda at that time."

"I still do a bit of riding myself and I was chatting at a practice track and Jamie's dad overheard me. Thorpey had spoken to him so he came across, we had a bit of a deal and I threw in the towel working with KTM in the workshop and went back racing."

"I've had a fantastic year with Jamie. He's such a good kid. He stays with me sometimes and if I'm prepping a bike he'll be out there jet washing and loading and unloading. He works really hard and I've got big aspirations for him."

"He's taking a big step but the fact he gives so much means I'll put everything I've got into helping him along."



championship with the possibility of a wildcard appearance in America in September.

"Our view is to build up and build up so going into 2018 we go back to GPs. Already I've spoken to Robert Jonas at Husqvarna in Austria who's agreed to let me have a 350 that we will probably develop and prepare to do the GP at Charlotte this coming season which will be a feeler for us."

"If we've had a relatively good year by the time Charlotte comes we'll look at doing it. The reason I want to do Charlotte is because I have a warehouse and staff there so it's an easy one for us and we thought it would be good motivation for Mel. It will give him something to work towards and also give us an insight into what we need to

work towards for 2018. That's the goal."

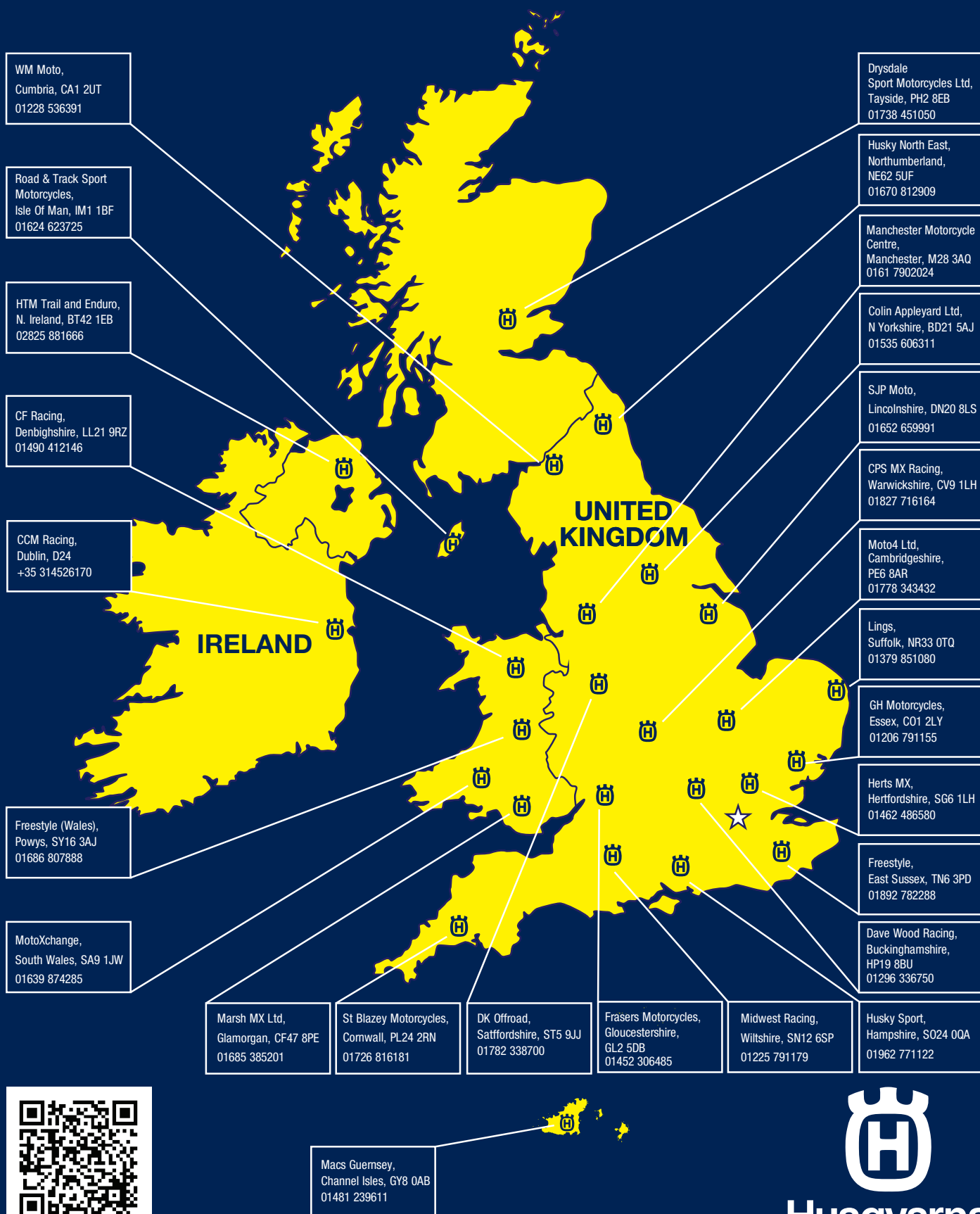
Mel's season will kick-off at the Redsand International in Spain this month followed by the Hawkstone International on February 5. Jamie's following a different training programme so will sit-out both events but he'll also race some rounds of the European championship.

"We're very optimistic about 2017. As a team we're excited, everything's gelled together and results wise I think we've got the right ingredients to be on the podium with Mel."

"There are a handful of riders who will be fighting for the championship and I think we've got as much a chance of being on the top step as any other title contender. It's there for the taking."

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MADDO UNPLUGGED!

Hold on to your hats folks as we delve deep into the mind of a mad man in next month's mag – in this case that of FMX legend Robbie Maddison. We'll also get to grips with the 2017 Honda CRF450R and check in on who's doing what in the AX Tour and the AMA SX series. Plus, we'll have a stack of other exclusives and some FREE stickers as well. Now if that ain't worth nipping down your local shop for then I don't know what is...

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